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# ATTRACTION

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# ATTRACTION

By

LOUISE MACK

AUTHOR OF "TEENS," "THEODORA'S HUSBAND"  
"THE ROMANCE OF A WOMAN OF THIRTY"

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# ATTRACTION

## CHAPTER I

### ONE PARTICULAR EVENING

ANOTHER dull evening. I feel it in my spine. I always know when an evening is going to be especially dull.

First there'll be dinner, and Papa will sit at one end of the table, and keep us all in a state of unnatural and creepy silence, while Mama will sit at the other, doing her poor sweet little best to unruffle the tumultuous cross-currents so often set in motion by the head of the house. Afterwards there'll be music, Patience, —*boredom!*

Here we all are in the drawing-room.

The clock strikes seven. At a quarter-past seven we dine. But it is always expected of us—the whole lot of us from Peggy downwards—that we assemble here a good fifteen minutes before Sarah announces “dinner!” in that cross-patch voice of hers.

I steal a glance about me.

Really, to look at us you'd think butter wouldn't melt in our mouths.

With our hairs brushed out, and a few fine feathers on us, we sit about the room, looking the very pinks of propriety, every man jack of us.

I'm opposite a mirror, and it pleases me to see—though it also surprises me a bit—that I look just as prim and pruney and prismsy as any one of my six sisters and brothers.

Mama, in a gown of pale grey satin, sits on the sofa knitting a sock for Geoffrey. Peggy crochets some lace, Hilary reads the "Graphic," Ermytrude is embroidering a Magyar blouse, Alice stitches a rough little flannel garment for some unhappy baby in India, Dick cons his Latin verbs on one side of the fireplace, (you can always trust boys to get the best places by the fire!), while Geoffrey, with excruciatingly smooth hair and clean hands, fingers Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," his wicked little mind dwelling all the time on a certain rat-hunt.

Only I, Teresa, am idle. I'm restless. I couldn't look at a needle, much less a book. Something possesses me ; I don't know what it is, unless it's an evil spirit.

Yes. That's about it.

I, Teresa Martindale, am filled to-night with a very devilry of unrest.

Heavens ! How smug we are ! How can we stand ourselves ! That's how I feel this evening.

And in a minute the door will open and Papa will come in, looking smugger still. But the truth is, and the sooner it's told the better, we're all desperately afraid of our paternal parent, in spite of his smugness.

Ah, here he is !

Instantly we all rise to our feet. Clockwork figures couldn't be more mechanical. We hasten towards him. We say "Good-evening, Papa !" We hold a cheek for his kiss. His sharp eyes run over us, taking in every detail of his flock.

Then he turns to Mama and says grandly,

"I've invited a guest to dinner. Will you kindly give orders for another place to be set at table?"

"Yes, dear!" says Mama.

"It's a young man who has come to me with an introduction from a very old friend. I'm afraid he's rather a rough diamond, but I'm told he's exceedingly clever. Perhaps we shall be able to make something of him at the office. We'll soon tone him down a little there."

"Yes, dear!" says Mama.

We all look at each other. Then we all look away, and assume blank, uninterested expressions, knowing quite well that Papa would be indignant if he saw us show signs of excitement or curiosity.

Papa takes out his watch.

"A quarter-past seven!" he says irritably.

Then Sarah appears at the door.

"Dinner!" she proclaims laconically, looking a trifle sourer than usual.

Mama glances nervously at Papa as time flies by.

"This is a nice beginning," says Papa. "Late! It looks bad. I told him a quarter-past seven sharp. But still"—he goes on a trifle less acridly—"it was a very hurried and impromptu and eleventh-hour invitation, and probably my young friend had a great hurry to get into his dress clothes, but——"

He breaks off suddenly.

We, watching him with our hearts in our mouths, see an expression of amazement, that swiftly turns into icy disapproval, cross his stern, chiselled old face as the door opens and a young man comes leisurely in.

"Mr. Hall!" announces Sarah from the doorway.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GREY TWEED SUIT

I THINK you would really *have* to see Papa before you could understand the enormity of the thing.

I'm twenty-one next birthday, and as far back as I remember, I've never once known my respected parent to sit down to dine except in dress clothes.

Dress is a perfect fetish of his. Mama is always obliged to appear in a low-cut dinner-gown. So are Peggy, Hilary, and myself. The boys don spruce little dinner jackets and patent leather shoes, and reduce their hair and nails to conditions of irreproachable correctness. Alice and Ermyntrode, my younger sisters, wear white muslin frocks and a blue and pink sash apiece, and a string of beads to match. And we have all been brought up to absolutely believe that Papa could not eat his dinner if any one of us failed to come up to the scratch.

Well, then, imagine Papa's guest !

He proved to be a tall, fair, broad-shouldered creature with a young, very stubborn-looking face. He advanced composedly, looked round him sharply, discovered Papa, and walked leisurely towards him.

He was dressed in a suit of rough grey tweed that had a certain well-worn appearance, as though he had worked it hard, and he wore brown street boots of a clumsy make.

In one agonised gaze I took in, to my relief, the fact

that his collar was perfectly clean, and his face shiny with soapy ablutions.

But his hair would need weeks of patient brushing to get it into anything like Martindale form.

My father looked him up and down.

For myself I should die if such a glance were meant for me.

Anything more cold, more disconcerting, more deliberately and collectively snubbing, could not be imagined.

But our visitor seemed blankly unconscious of it.

“Afraid I’m a bit late,” he said.

Deliberately he turned away from Papa and looked round the room. His eyes took us all in. But instead of seeming uncomfortable when he discovered our condition of pristine correctness, he appeared entirely satisfied with himself.

He shook hands with Mama ; then, even whilst doing so, his eyes suddenly jumped away and fixed themselves on me, in a long, pronounced, deliberate stare.

I felt quite nervous.

I saw the impatient colour coming up into Papa’s cheeks, and understood how he was chafing at the delay, and I breathed a big sigh of relief, and so I’m sure did the whole seven of us when Papa, with Mama on his arm, made a bee-line for the dining-room.

And then came the worst of it.

Without waiting to be told where to sit, our extraordinary visitor seated himself calmly on the chair beside *me* !

“I’ll sit here, shall I ? ” he said calmly to nobody in particular.

Then he turned his head in my direction.

“You’re awfully like a sister of mine,” he said.

His eyes were fixed on my face.

I knew I was going scarlet.

Across the table Geoffrey was threatened with suppressed giggles, while Peggy and Hilary also both looked as though it was all they could do to keep from bursting out laughing.

"She's my only sister," went on this strange, collected person. "You're awfully like her. Same eyes, same hair, and she gets red just like you. Or she used to; she's married now, poor child. She has a jolly hard time of it, I can tell you."

Papa's voice struck in icily.

"Mr. Hall!"

"Yes, sir!"

With evident reluctance our guest turned away from me.

"By Jove, Mr. Martindale, this daughter of yours here is extraordinarily like my sister Nippy! I wish you could just see Nippy. Upon my word, I don't believe you yourself would know which was which! Put Nippy in smart clothes like hers"—nodding his head in my direction—"they'd be taken for twins!"

"Extremely interesting!" said Papa, bolting a large mouthful of hot soup, and settling into a scornful, ominous silence.

But do you suppose that made any difference to Mr. Hall?

Not a bit of it!

He seemed relieved that Papa had taken himself to the solace of his dinner, and looking round the table he began to address a loud-voiced, unembarrassed conversation to the gracious lady in grey satin, whose kindly face would necessarily appeal to him as it appealed to every living being.

"Mr. Martindale's trying to get me to go into his office," he began.

“ Indeed ? ” said Mama.

“ Yes. That’s how he came to ask me to dinner.”

“ I see,” said Mama.

I knew perfectly well she was scared out of her life, poor darling Mama !

But still, when all was said and done, this young man was Papa’s guest, not hers.

## CHAPTER III

### “ROUND THE RED-LITTEN TABLE”

IT was at the orange-pudding that Papa at last sufficiently recovered himself to again address his conversation towards the tall, broad-shouldered young man in grey clothes, who looked so extraordinarily out of place among all us spruce, neat, beribboned, and bebrushed Martindales.

“You’ll find, Mr. Hall,” he said cuttingly, “that the one indispensable adjunct for a business man is punctuality.”

This, of course, was a dig at our visitor for making us ten minutes late for dinner.

“Oh, I don’t know so much about that!” Mr. Hall answered breezily. “For my part, I think punctuality’s a frightfully overrated virtue. I think the thing is to be punctual to your plans—punctual to your thoughts. Though, of course, I do think it’s absolutely indispensable to be punctual when keeping somebody else waiting does them an injustice. For instance, if a man keeps me waiting for my pay, I pretty soon let him know it. A farmer’s life is a funny one! I was farming, you know, down in Norfolk. I farmed from when I was fourteen to when I was twenty-two.”

Again the thunder-clouds gathered round Papa’s brow. But he controlled himself.



“ A shipping office, Mr. Hall, is a very different thing from a farm,” he observed scathingly.

“ Oh, I know that ! ”

“ And the firm of Martindale & Martindale will hardly bear comparison with your little farm in Norfolk. I mean to say,” Papa went on quickly, “ that when you enter my office you will discover——”

But he found himself brusquely interrupted. So brusquely, indeed, that we all fairly gasped in amazement.

Our guest threw up his head, while a concentrated gleam came into those strange, clear, direct eyes of his, that somehow, in spite of all their sharpness and uncompromisingness of glance, reminded me of rain-wet violets. They’d have been beautiful eyes if they were on any other man but this one, for the lashes were quite long and curly, and when you saw right into the eyes they had a nice, almost sweet, expression, though I suppose nobody but myself had discovered it yet, as I was the only one of us who had really seen into them.

“ Well, look here, Mr. Martindale ! About that offer of yours ! I’m not so sure, after all, that I’ll accept it ! ”

He put his elbow on the table, leaned forward, and stared hard at his astounded host.

## CHAPTER IV

“ ORDINARY IDEAS ARE NEVER ANY GOOD ! ”

I THINK that up to that minute we had all been wondering the same thing.

We had all been asking ourselves how Papa could ever have contemplated taking this young man into his business.

Now, all of a sudden, my eyes began to open.

Young as I was, I couldn't help saying to myself that there must be something rather remarkable in a man who could talk to Papa as he did.

He was perfectly calm.

He was perfectly self-possessed.

“ I have been thinking things over,” he was saying, in those tense, far-reaching tones of his. “ I've worked the whole thing out. I've gone into it very carefully, sir ; and look here, Mr. Martindale, this is the conclusion I've come to. If I go into your office now at the salary you offer me, where should I be in ten years' time ? That's the question. I admit it's a good salary to begin with, but I am sorry to say I don't think it would be a good salary to end with. I mean to say, I don't think there's enough progression in your firm, Mr. Martindale. Not for a young man like me. And progression's the thing. What a man wants, after all, is a chance to *get on*. Any fool can get four pounds a week when he's twenty-five. But he'll get four pounds a week when he's fifty-five. And every

likely by the time he's sixty-five he'll still be getting four pounds a week ! ”

He paused, and set his brow with a strange and determined expression.

Then he thumped the table—our beautiful, fine, white damask tablecloth—thumped it with his clenched fist.

“ And all because he didn't begin low enough down,” he ended stridently.

“ Really, Mr. Hall, your ideas are most extraordinary ! ”

“ I hope they are. Ordinary ideas are never any good.”

“ Perhaps you'd prefer the position of office boy ? ”

“ I wouldn't mind a bit.”

“ I should think you'd have no difficulty in getting it.”

“ Oh, I'm serious. You're getting at me, Mr. Martindale. But I'm serious. I mean what I say. Now, *your* firm is perfectly solid, and all that sort of thing, but it isn't progressive. That's what I want. I want progressiveness. And after I left you this afternoon I got an offer from some other people, the Tindalls. They're quite a young firm. They've got their way to make. But upon my word, I think there'd be a much better chance for me to get on if I went into their business than if I went into yours.”

I watched him, fascinated.

As he talked, he was a changed being.

His eyes flashed, and he looked masterful enough to rule the whole world, and self-confident enough to undertake the job.

To my amazement, he also looked what I should

never have suspected of him—quite aggressively handsome.

But before I could finish my thoughts, Papa had menaced Mama with his glance, and she had risen and was getting us all out of the dining-room as quickly as possible.

## CHAPTER V

### LITTLE BEASTS !

THE minute we got inside the drawing-room with the door shut safely behind us, we all gave way.

“What a horrible man ! ”

“Oh, how hateful he is ! ”

“Did you ever see such boots ? ”

“And such clothes ! ”

“But what a voice ! How dared he talk to Papa like that ? ”

“He wears the wrong collars ! ”

“He wore a red tie ! ”

“He ate his fish with his big knife and fork ! ”

“He asked Sarah three times to give him some more bread ! ”

“He kept Sarah waiting about five minutes with the soufflé while he was holding forth. She couldn’t get his plate away ! ”

“He poured his wine into the tumbler ! ”

“He ate mustard with his chicken ! ”

“Did you ever see any one so conceited ? ”

“Fancy Papa asking him ! ”

“Poor Papa ! He’s having a treat with him ! ”

“Oh, but you, Teresa !—poor old Teresa !—you had the worst of it ! ”

“Teresa had him next to her, and he stared at her as if he had never seen a girl in his life before.”

“You *did* get red, Teresa ! ”

“ Well, no wonder ! You’d have got red if he’d looked at you like that.”

“ It must have been awful to be so near him ! ”

They turned their attention on me then, and one and all regarded me with pitying glances.

“ If I’d been you, I’d have kicked him on the shins,” said Geoffrey valiantly.

“ Or trodden on his toes,” said little black-haired Alice, the spoilt darling of our family.

We all laughed.

“ Thank goodness he wasn’t near me ! ” said Peggy fervently.

“ Or me ! ” said Hilary.

“ Or me ! ” echoed Ermyintrude.

“ Oh, old Teresa was the only one he had eyes for,” put in the irrepressible Geoffrey. (A bit of a demon, did I say so before ?) “ He’s dead nuts on Teresa ! ”

“ Geoffrey, how dare you ! ”

But in spite of my attempt at dignified repression, I found myself blushing furiously.

Peggy rose, and went over to the piano.

Striking a few soft chords, she began, *sotto voce*, in a sweet, melting little voice,

“ I want you, my honey, I want you every minute.

I’m thinking of you daily, and nobody else is in it !

So come back to please me,

Don’t try for to tease me ;

For I want you, my honey—

Yes, I want you, want you, want you—

Yes, I want you, my honey—yes, I do ! ”

The pretty eyes looked at me teasingly. Her innuendo was obvious.

Then Geoffrey, of course, made it more obvious still.

He pranced up and down before me, snapped his fingers, grinned, and improvised :

"Hall wants you, my honey—he wants you every minute.

Hall's thinking of you daily, and nobody else is in it.

So come back to please him,

Don't try for to tease him ;

For Hall wants you, my honey—

Yes, he wants you, wants you, wants you—

Yes, Hall wants you, my honey—yes, he do !"

Bursts of suppressed laughter followed this impertinence.

I made a dive at Geoff, but he slipped like an eel under the sofa, and came out presently on the other side of the piano.

"Beast !" I cried furiously.

"Don't get your hair off !" put in Dick.

"Beast !" I repeated, flinging the word in his direction also.

So you see, we Martindales, off guard, were not quite so prim as Papa believed !

Mama, I must add, had meanwhile left us for a moment, having stolen away to the library to make quite sure that the fire was in exactly the condition Papa demanded, that his pet cigars were ready to his hand, and his evening letters arranged on his desk. Dear Mama ! She would never trust any one but herself to see to little things like this.

Peggy left the piano, and came over to me. She slipped her hand through my arm, and drew me in front of the fire, and we stood there, one pale satin foot of each resting on the fender.

"Teresa," she said seriously, lowering her voice, "don't think me very mean to have laughed. I was sorry for you, really, old girl."

A sudden combative feeling came over me.

"Really, I don't see why you should be sorry," I said coldly.

"For the way that creature looked at you !"

“ Anybody can look at anybody ! ”

“ You don’t mean to say you like him ! ”

“ Oh, I don’t know. You all seem to have a frightful down on him. Considering that you none of you know anything about him, I think it’s rather *mean* ! ”

“ We know enough about him to know he’s absolutely hateful ! ”

“ I don’t know that he is. ”

“ What do you mean ? ”

Peggy looked at me in amazement.

But I had come to the end of my brief little attempt to stand up for the aggressive Hall. “ After all,” I thought desperately, “ why should I attempt to defend him ? I don’t like him any more than the others. ”

In fact, I had positively hated him when he sat and stared at me, and made me the laughing-stock of those imps of brothers.

It was only that in some strange, indefinable way I felt that, conceited, brusque, mannerless, bumptious as he might be, *underneath there was something else* !

But I would rather have died than have said this to Peggy.

She would have thought me an idiot.



## CHAPTER VI

“DO YOU PLAY ? DO YOU SING ? ”

ONE glance into my father's face as he entered the drawing-room, Mr. Hall following him, and I saw that whatever had been the conversation between himself and his guest, his condition of mind was now anything but harmonious. He was frowning heavily, and his eyes were full of suppressed anger.

Mama, who had come gliding in a moment before, went up to him and said something to him in her sweet, smooth voice, attempting also to draw Mr. Hall into the conversation.

But in vain.

That irrepressible person's eyes had gone roving round the room until they rested upon me. Then, taking not the slightest notice of any one else, he dived straight across to my side and sat down beside me on the sofa.

“Do you play, Miss Martindale ? ” he began immediately.

“No.”

“Pity ! I'm so fond of music.”

It was always the same thing with him. Always I—I—I—I !

And what on earth had my not playing got to do with his being fond of music ?

He bent towards me.

“Do you sing?”

Really, I could scarcely have believed his voice could have sounded so gentle.

“A little,” I replied.

“I wish you’d sing for me now.”

“I can’t!”

“Oh, do!”—persistently.

“No!” I said sharply.

Luckily, Papa had drawn the others into a discussion on their various doings for the day, putting questions from one to the other with his usual paternal solicitude. So, though I knew I was not forgotten—far from it—at any rate, I had the satisfaction of knowing I was not being actually observed by those imps of brothers.

My companion lowered his voice.

“What a pretty dress you have on!”

It was just as if he were speaking to a child.

I glanced down at my pale-blue charmeuse skirts; then, looking up, I saw myself in a mirror opposite, and him too.

What an odd pair I saw reflected there; a fair-haired girl with a pale skin, green eyes, and rather red lips, was wearing a pretty, shimmery evening gown, with short sleeves and low neck. She had a string of pearls about her white throat and a pale pink rose in her fichu. Beside her sat a big, fair-haired man in rough grey morning clothes. The girl’s little feet, in pale-blue satin shoes, peeped out of the edge of her skirt; while the young man’s, in heavy brown boots, stuck out obtrusively half across the rug.

“Tell me,” he said suddenly, in that gentle voice that struck me so curiously, “tell me, Miss Martindale, do I seem a very rough kind of fellow? I’m not used to society, you know. You can see that, can’t you?” Then, without waiting for my reply, he hurried on:

“I wonder what are your tastes? You’re quite an enigma to me.”

“That’s hardly strange, is it, considering you’ve only just met me?”

“Oh, I shall soon get to know you.”

“Perhaps it’ll be a little more difficult than you think,” I said snubbingly.

“No! I *mean* to get to know you.”

“Do you always do everything you mean to?”

“Always!”

“I’m sorry for you, then.”

“Why?”

“Because one of these days you’re bound to have a frightful disappointment.”

At that I observed the fair-haired girl in the blue send almost a coquettish glance into the intent face of the fair young man in grey, and I started, and tried to bring myself to my senses.

My experience of men was extremely limited, but I knew from books that if you want to keep them in their places you must look away from them coldly.

I did so immediately, turning my face aside.

“You’ve an awfully pretty profile,” he remarked instantly.

“Please don’t be personal.”

He started, and for the first time looked a little upset.

“Did I annoy you?” he asked contritely. “I wouldn’t do that for the world.”

“Well, then, don’t make personal remarks.”

“All right, I won’t; I give you my word. You’re awfully pretty, and it’s hard to help saying so. But, since it annoys you, I’ll try and never say it again. Only”—he leaned forward and looked deep into my eyes—“only, it’s there all the time. It’s hidden

in my heart, because you wish it so. But it's there."

"What's there?"

I couldn't help it. I was simply furiously interested in him, and it was no use pretending I was not.

"What I think of you," he answered.

And all the while his eyes were on my face gloatingly, intently, and I was perfectly aware that he had not a thought at the moment for any one else in the room.

"You think it strange that I should speak to you like this?" he said, after a minute.

"I don't think about it at all," I answered.

I jumped up suddenly, overcome by a queer incomprehensible feeling of terror, and without a word I left him, and hurried straight away across the room to my father's side.

Mama, seeing our guest stand solitary and perplexed in the middle of the room, called him over to look at some photographs.

"Do you care for scenes like this, Mr. Hall?" she asked.

"Don't call me *Mr. Hall*!"

"What shall we call you, then?"

"Couldn't you make it 'Patrick'? Nobody's called me Patrick since my mother died."

"But you have a sister?"

"I quarrelled with my sister's husband, and they haven't spoken to me for the last five years."

"Are you quarrelsome?"

"No. But I didn't want my sister to marry Harry Tecton. I didn't like him. Not because he was poor. That had nothing to do with my not liking the marriage. As a matter of fact, I'd much rather any girl married a man who had his way to make. I think that's a good thing for a girl to do."

“ I’m afraid you won’t find many girls to agree with you,” said Mama, smilingly.

“ Well, I’ve got to find *one* ! ” he answered gravely.

As he spoke, he turned his head deliberately and searched about the room till his eyes rested on ME !

## CHAPTER VII

### SARAH PRECIPITATES AN INTERVIEW

LIFE in our household goes on in the most humdrum way that can be imagined. Every task is set, every hour is mapped out, and as we are a fairly big family—seven all told, not counting Mama and Papa—and we girls are all expected to keep up our reading, drawing, painting, embroidery, French, German, music, singing, in addition to golf, hockey, and tennis, we have a pretty busy time of it. Peggy does the flowers, Hilary attends to the books and Mama's charities, I am entrusted with the sweet mission of watching over Geoffrey, Alice, and Ermyntrode while they do their practice on the piano ; so there's little time for dreaming, even if any of us Martindales were that way inclined.

This afternoon at three o'clock, while I was all alone in the house except for Alice, who was practising, with little tinkling fingers, Mozart's Sonata in A Minor, Sarah came to me in the schoolroom and said a gentleman wanted to see me in the drawing-room.

"What gentleman?" I cried, in surprise.

I was flabbergasted, and naturally, for Papa keeps us absurdly strict, refusing to admit we're grown-up because he hates to think that some day he may have to part with any of his flock, or perhaps because he

thinks that we would have too much liberty if any of us by any chance got married.

"The one that was here to dinner the other night," said Sarah grimly.

"You don't mean Mr. Hall?"

"Yes, I do."

"Are you *sure*, Sarah?"

I could scarcely believe that even *he* would have the audacity to come at this hour in the afternoon and ask for me.

"It's Mr. Hall, Miss Teresa!" said Sarah crossly. "I asked him 'ad he a card, and he said 'No.' I told him I didn't think you could see 'im, but 'e took no notice. He actually walked past me, came inside, and said to me: 'Go and see, please!'—just like that." She looked at me sternly. "Now, Miss Teresa, you take my advice, and send that young gentleman about his business."

Now that was where Sarah erred.

I, Teresa Martindale, am the last person in the world to be advised and admonished as though I were an infant, and instantly my pride rose.

"I am quite capable of managing my own affairs, thank you, Sarah. Tell Mr. Hall I will come down immediately."

"Now, Miss Teresa, you take my advice——"

"Thank you, Sarah. Your advice is unnecessary. Go and do as I tell you!"

Then I flew to my room, leaving Alice to struggle with Mozart's sweet, silvery music.

I looked in the glass and saw that my hair wanted a touch or two, and I hastily pulled out a curl, re-twisted it round my fingers, and pinned it neatly in its place. Also I snatched off the black bow at my throat, and stuck on a trim, smart little affair of green

velvet and gold fringe, that brought out the colour of my eyes and lent a more afternoony look to my Peter Pan collar of home-made crochet.

What did I do next? Well, to be absolutely and strictly truthful, I believe I put on a drop of scent, gave my nails a hurried rub with a polisher, and then looked at my feet.

Really I can't think what possessed me, for before I knew what I was doing I had kicked off my little black *suède* shoes that had seen better days, and hastily rummaged in my wardrobe for a very smart new pair—dull-green antelope, with long toes and high heels; perfect ducks they were—and I can't imagine why I wanted to waste them on that great, clumsy, stupid man.

But they matched the bow at my throat, and went very prettily with my frock of dull-grey cashmere, high-waisted and skimpy.

Then I said to myself:

“What does it matter what I look like? I'm not going to dress up for him!” And I walked with great dignity downstairs and into the drawing-room, my intention being to thoroughly wither him up.



## CHAPTER VIII

### BLOSSOMS

HE was walking up and down the room like a caged lion, and as I paused in the doorway my eyes rapidly took in the following details :

First, he wore the self-same suit that he had dined in the other night ; second, he had on the same boots ; third, his hair looked rougher than ever ; fourth, he bore an even more pugnacious, obstinate, and persistent expression than the other evening.

“ Good-afternoon, Mr. Hall ! ” I said stiffly.

He literally rushed towards me, and I saw, lying on a chair, an enormous bouquet of wallflowers, stocks, and forget-me-nots, with a deep border of mignonette all round it.

“ Where did those come from ? ” I asked icily, my eyes on the flowers.

“ I brought them,” he answered promptly. He turned, picked them up, and laid them in my arms. “ Aren’t they nice ? ” he added, of his own accord. “ They came from the country. I knew you’d like them ! ”

I thought of the flowers that were sent to Peggy sometimes by an ardent admirer of hers—Lord Creay—and a vision flashed over me of those exquisite hot-house roses, carnations, white lilac, stephanotis, and orchids, carefully wired and arranged in baskets

that in themselves were perfect works of art, and were brought to the house by a boy in livery from the smartest florists in London.

“Smell them !” Patrick Hall said eagerly, watching me intently out of those sharp, uncompromising eyes of his ; and I—for want of something else to do, I suppose—buried my nose in the dewy blossoms.

Certainly Peggy’s flowers could be no sweeter than these fragrant, homely blooms.

“I knew you would like them,” Patrick Hall observed contentedly. “You’re just the sort of girl who’d like nice, fresh country flowers. You wouldn’t care for hot-house things. And besides, they’re so expensive.”

“But why do you bring me flowers at all ?”

“Because I wanted to.”

“I really do not see that that is any reason.”

As I spoke, I laid his flowers—that were not expensive!—on a table, and then I turned the first of my withering glances upon him. I was about to ask him why he had come, when he interrupted me sharply.

“You’d better put those flowers in water.” He took two strides to the bell and rang it. “Flowers and girls want looking after,” he said, with an absolute seriousness that fairly struck me dumb.

“Is that what you came to say ?”

“Are you cross with me ?”

“Absurd !”

“Have I offended you ?”

A parlour-maid appeared.

“Did you ring, Miss ?” she inquired.

“We want some water for these flowers !” called Patrick Hall before I could even open my lips. “Get a big vase, a jug, or something that won’t crush them—and put a bit of salt in the water, too. That’ll

help to freshen them up—they've come all the way from Norfolk ! ”

At that my ire rose suddenly.

I picked up the flowers, handed them to Jane, and asked her to take them away.

“ You'd better arrange them outside,” I told her with dignity.

“ Yes, they'll make such a mess in here,” threw in my visitor.

Jane disappeared, and we were alone again.

He turned to me eagerly.

“ Will you come for a walk ? ”

“ A *walk* ! ”

“ In Kensington Gardens. It's such a heavenly day ! ” He stepped close to me and looked down into my eyes, and his face wore a wistful, pleading expression, strangely at variance with his usual obstinate, conceited look. “ There's such a jolly blue sky ! The birds are singing. I'll take you to have tea there, if you like.”

“ Thank you. I cannot go with you to tea.”

“ Oh, do come ! What are you doing ? Why can't you get away ? ”

Desperately I sought for an answer sufficiently crushing, but before I could find it he was speaking again.

“ You'd better come with me. It's the last chance I'll have. I'm going into Tindall's firm to-morrow.”

For a moment I was silent, then I drew myself up with the air of a tragedy queen.

“ Really, Mr. Hall ! ” I said. “ I wonder what you think I'm made of ! If you suppose I have so little sense of dignity as to go out with you surreptitiously, and have tea with you in Kensington Gardens——”

“ What on earth are you talking about ? ”

I stared at him in silence.

“*Surreptitiously!* Who on earth wants you to come *surreptitiously*? That’s the last thing in the world I’d suggest! Haven’t I come here quite openly?” he added in amazement.

He looked bewildered.

“I gave my name,” he went on presently, “I asked for you. I brought you flowers. What on earth else could I do?”

“*Nothing!*”

I flung the word at him in the deepest irritation I had ever felt for any human being.

“Well, then, get your hat on and come along! Don’t waste time! I tell you it’s the last afternoon I’ve got!”

Dumbly I looked at him. He was such a big, stalwart, determined creature, that I had desperately to gather all my forces before I felt equal to routing him.

“Since you force me to say it,” I told him freezingly, at last, “nothing on earth would induce me to go for a walk with you!”

“Don’t you like me?” he asked immediately.

“I have no feeling about you whatever!”

“That’s not true. You dislike me.”

“Mr. Hall, in decent society, gentlemen do not tell ladies that what they say is not true.”

“Miss Martindale, don’t speak to me like that! You’re taking me the wrong way.”

His eyes looked full of pain.

But I moved towards the door, ignoring him entirely.

“Are you going to leave me?” he asked in evident dismay.

“I’ve rung for Jane. She’ll show you out,” I

replied coldly. And before he could speak or stop me, I had slipped away and shut the door behind me.

But it was quite ten minutes afterwards when I heard the front door slam.

However, no power on earth would have induced me to ask Jane what he was saying to her.

Odious, horrid, conceited, detestable, pig-headed, impertinent man! I hoped never to see his face again!

## CHAPTER IX

“DEAR MISS MARTINDALE !”

It was two days later.

The sun—what there was of it—came pouring into our morning-room, while the scent of eggs-and-bacon, mingling with that of sausages and tea, chocolate and coffee, vied with the odour of devilled kidneys.

“Post !” announced Jane, placing a goodly salver of letters at the end of the table beside my father.

Papa began to dole out the letters, always his supreme prerogative, which nothing on earth was allowed to interfere with, and in a reverie I sat and watched Peggy smiling callously over a note which I guessed was from poor little Lord Creay.

Suddenly my father’s voice broke in on me sharply, and I realised that he was addressing me.

“Teresa !”

“Yes, Papa ?”

I looked round confusedly.

Long ago I had asked all my girl friends never to post their letters to me at night, so that I should not have the worry of receiving them at Papa’s hands at breakfast, so it was only once in a blue moon that the morning post brought anything for me. Therefore I felt quite startled when I saw Papa gently balancing a letter in his right hand, and looking at me significantly.

“What curious handwriting this is !”

He adjusted his spectacles and held the letter close to his eyes.

“Very bold, very dashing ! I seem to know that calligraphy. Teresa, my dear, who is your correspondent ?”

They passed the letter down the table, and I, in utter unconsciousness of what was coming, received it and looked at it hard.

The handwriting was unknown to me.

But even while I was tearing it open, a sudden dreadful suspicion came over me, and with fumbling, nervous fingers I drew the closely-written sheets from their envelope.

I was getting scarlet ; I felt that even my nose was going red, and away down the table Papa was waiting—waiting like some figure of Fate—to know the name of my correspondent.

Then words began to dance before my eyes, and I asked myself, desperately, was this man mad ?

“DEAR MISS MARTINDALE,

“It was an awful pity you could not come with me the other day. I went alone, but I kept thinking of you all the time, for I know you’d have loved being out there having tea in the sunlight, and I really wanted you to come.

“I write now to ask you if I may have the pleasure of taking you to a theatre some night, as I can’t get away in the day-time ?

“What would you like to go to ? I like Shakespeare best myself. I think he is the only decent playwright there is. He is the only one who gives you the real inside of men and women. I would like to take you to see ‘Macbeth.’ Had I better ask one

of your sisters, too ? Or would your mother come ? I leave that to you.

“ The thing is—and I don’t want you to misunderstand me—I want *you* to come, and that’s all that matters.

“ I know I must seem to you a very rough customer ; I know I have no airs and graces, and when I’m in earnest I forget all about manners and that kind of thing ; but perhaps when you know me better you won’t think so badly of me. I am very anxious that you should not think badly of me, as you can see by this note.

“ I’d like to tell you about myself.”

(I dare say you would, I thought to myself fiercely.)

“ My father was a farmer in Norfolk, but things went wrong, and we lost a lot of money, and when he died I kept the farm on for my mother’s sake. I started farming when I was fourteen—the year my father died—and for my mother’s sake I kept going at it as long as she lived. I worked like a nigger, but farming’s not what it was.

“ Well, then my mother died, and the farm passed away from me, so I had to strike out for myself. I was just twenty, and I came up to London and got into a shipping office as a clerk, and there I stuck for some time. Finally I got sick of it, for I saw there was nothing to be gained from staying on, so I chucked it. I wanted to get into a better office, and that’s how I came into contact with Mr. Martindale, your father. An old friend of my mother’s gave me an introduction to him, and he would have taken me into his firm, but I decided it wasn’t good enough, not progressive enough.

“ So now I have gone into Tindalls’, and I’m going to master the whole business of shipping. I don’t



care how hard I work—that’s nothing to me. The thing is, I mean to get to the top. I *will* get there !

“Do you believe me, I wonder ? You look the sort of girl a man could pin his faith to ; that struck me about you the first minute I saw you.

“Now, this is the question : Ought I to come and see your mother ?

“You see, when all’s said and done, I’m only a country yokel. I’ve never given a woman a thought before. But I want to do the right thing. If I am awkward and blundering, won’t you put me right ?

“I can only get away Saturday afternoons and Sundays now that I am at Tindalls’, unless I call at night. What do you think ?

“Trusting you will answer this letter in the spirit in which it is written,

“Believe me,

“Yours faithfully,

“PATRICK HALL.”

What I can never understand is how I read that letter without falling to the floor.

In one wild, terrified stare I took in its contents, while from the far end of the table my father sat watching me with a look of petrifying displeasure on his face.

“Teresa !”

“Yes, Papa ?”

“You’ve not answered my question.”

“What question, Papa ?”

“Who is your correspondent ?”

I saw my face like a peony in the mirror opposite. Then the colour left it as though blown away by a wind, leaving me very white and frightened.

“Who is your correspondent ?” Papa repeated.

“ Mr. Hall.”

An acute and deadly silence fell upon the breakfast table.

“ What do you mean ? What Mr. Hall ? ”

I searched wildly for an answer.

How should I describe him ?

“ *Your* Mr. Hall,” I stammered out, at last.

“ Do you mean that young man who came to dinner the other night ? ”

“ Yes, Papa.”

“ He has *written* to you ? ”

“ Yes, Papa.”

Another dreadful silence.

Then my father spoke in a voice of thunder.

“ Bring me the letter ! ”

I rose to my feet and stumbled a little, and looked round blindly.

I saw those faces—Peggy, Hilary, Ermyintrude, Alice, Dick, and Geoffrey—watching me with excruciating expressions of suppressed curiosity and derision.

Suddenly I decided I would die rather than show that letter.

I crushed it in my hand, turned, and rushed out of the room like a whirlwind.

A minute later, and regardless of consequences, I had buried it with a poker in the very heart of the schoolroom fire.

“ And that,” I said to myself, “ that is the end—the very end—of Patrick Hall ! ”

## CHAPTER X

“ PETER ! ”

LATELY—I don’t know why—I’ve been thinking quite a good deal about Love.

I suppose there *is* such a thing.

One hears of it on all sides, and reads of it everywhere.

And yet, personally, I never seem to have actually realised that it exists. It always seems to me like a myth, a romance, a fairy tale—something that happens to people in books and poems, and perhaps in real life—but will never happen to me. No ! The more I think of it, the more absolutely positive I am I haven’t got it in me to fall in love.

Am I a freak, I wonder ?

The kind of men I admire are men like Napoleon, Garibaldi, Cromwell, Bismarck, Mr. Carnegie, Abraham Lincoln—men who have made their way, every bit of it, themselves. That’s what I like. I like men who began at the very beginning without a shilling in their pockets, and fought life and circumstances with such pluck and firmness that they conquered by sheer force of character.

I wonder shall I ever meet a man like that ?

Most young men nowadays seem to want to have everything done for them, and if their fathers can’t do it for them they look out for a father-in-law who can.

No! A man must be a true man to please me. He must be hard as nails (to everybody except me!). He must have a persistence that's almost——

“Miss Teresa! Miss Teresa! Open the door!”

“All right, Sarah, I'm coming!”

What an interruption!

Sarah, with a face as black as night, came stumbling into the room with something in her arms, while I locked my diary hastily away.

The something was a basket, just an ordinary, innocent-looking, little brown basket.

But when Sarah plumped it down on the floor, it moved, it wriggled, it appeared to be animated.

Then from within issued a thin, but very piercing, succession of noises.

“Gracious, Sarah? What on earth is that?”

“What is it, indeed! That's what *I'd* like to know!”

“But who on earth is it for?”

“For you, Miss Teresa. A messenger-boy brought it, and this letter with it. Impudent young cub, he was! He says to me, ‘See that this letter and basket is given direct into the hands of Miss Teresa Martindale.’ Such goings-on!”

“That will do, Sarah!”

With trembling fingers I tore open the letter, gave one glance at it, and turned scarlet.

“You can go, Sarah,” I told her hastily.

She moved away reluctantly, her eyes fixed grimly on that little basket to the last; then I flew to the door, shut and locked it, and down on my knees I plumped.

Feverishly I untied the string and raised the lid.

A little adorable brown, woolly baby of a retriever stared up at me with a pair of innocent, questioning,

appealing, childlike eyes. A wet, red mouth opened, emitting faint squeals, half of terror, half of supplication.

“ Oh, you *darling* ! ” I cried.

It really was the sweetest, most adorable pet of a puppy I had ever seen in my life, and when I lifted it out it moved its little woolly self across my bedroom carpet, and, going straight to the glass, stood looking at itself with an expression of immense surprise. I felt I positively wanted to *eat* it !

Spellbound I watched it. Anything so soft, so round, so cuddlesome in the way of a dog I had never seen.

Yet there was something sporting about it too. For all its softness and curliness it wasn't finicking and silly.

Turning my back on it while it preened at itself in the mirror, I uncrumpled the letter and swiftly read it through.

“ I am sending you a dog. I've called him ‘ Peter. ’ If you say ‘ Peter ’ to him, he will know who you mean. I think he's the sort of dog that will just suit you, and I hope you'll like him.

“ Don't give him anything but bread and milk and biscuits, and a bone to cut his teeth on, and give him a bath once a week. Use Spratt's dog-soap.

“ Don't let him sleep in a draught, and see that he doesn't go too near the fire. You can begin in a fortnight to brush and comb him every day, and take him for a walk. And whatever you do, don't give him meat. You'll give him the mange if you do.

“ Why didn't you answer my last letter ? I've called twice, and each time I've been told that you were out.

“ I asked for your mother, and I was told that she was out too.

“ I shall call round again as soon as I can, because I want very much to see you, and you know it.

“ P. H.”

Was there ever such a person !

Of all the hateful, conceited, obstinate, *persistent* men !

Would nothing snub him ?

If he had had the slightest gumption, he must have seen that neither I nor any of us Martindales wanted to have anything to do with him, for Papa had actually issued orders that if ever he called we were “ not at home ! ” Yet twice he had called—twice—and twice had been given the cold shoulder. And now he had sent me a dog !

Of all things in the world, *a dog !*

Never in my life had I known the house of Martindale to harbour any four-footed animal save Tibby, our grumpy, old, greedy black cat.

Papa hates dogs. He'd rather die than let us have one about the house. He says they spoil the carpets, lie on cushions, and are always having to be fed or walked or bathed or brushed.

He says dogs are all very well for the country, but in town they're an outrage. If I've heard that once from Papa's lips, I've heard it a hundred times. And yet there, in his daughter Teresa's bedroom, gazing in his daughter Teresa's looking-glass, poking its nose in his daughter Teresa's slippers, was that fascinating Peter. Great Heavens ! Papa'd have had a blue fit if he could have seen him !

“ I must put you back in your basket and send you straight away,” I said.

Peter whined and licked my shoe with an infinitesimal tongue.

“ Yes, you darling ! I hate to let you go, and that’s the truth of it. But I must ! ”

Peter deserted my toes for his own tail. Then he whined and looked at me again—the sweetest look—and I gathered him up in my arms, and cuddled him, and looked in his mouth, and laughed, and rolled him on his back on the rug. Every moment it got harder and harder to let him go.

I felt as if I’d had him all my life, and as if I couldn’t possibly live without him.

But back he would certainly have to go.

Even if I were allowed to have a dog, nothing would induce me to keep a present from Patrick Hall.

Then Peter whined again, emitting funny little cries, just like a baby’s, and deserting his tail he rolled his fat little brown body over towards me, and looked up pleadingly.

“ You’re hungry ! ” I cried aghast.

And then my eyes fell on a tin standing in a corner of his basket, and I saw inscribed on it, in big letters, “ Spratt’s Puppy Biscuits ” ; so I took one out and broke it up for him, and he ate it and wagged his tail and stopped crying.

Then I put him back in his basket, and he immediately curled himself up into a ball and went to sleep.

And just then the dressing-bell rang for dinner, and I realised that I couldn’t possibly send Peter back that night. I had all my work cut out to be in time for dinner.

Therefore, when I ran downstairs, I locked the door, and carried the key in my pocket.

## CHAPTER XI

### FOUND OUT

WE were browsing peacefully over our grapes and walnuts, the part of dinner that always seems to me to repay one for the trouble taken over soup, fish, and meat. Papa was sipping port, while Mama cracked his walnuts.

An air of gentle placidity was muffling all our sharper everyday sensations. To look at us all you'd have thought butter wouldn't melt in any of our mouths.

And of us all, the gentlest and most relaxed was the dreaded head of our household, whose lips were now wreathed in a quiet contented smile as he alternately surveyed his olive branches and his good old tawny Tarragon.

Suddenly a shriek burst on our ears.

Next moment the dining-room door was flung open, and a young housemaid threw herself into the room.

Her face was white as death. Her eyes were wide with fright. She trembled like an aspen leaf, and uttered one shriek after another before she could make a coherent statement.

Papa got up and shook her by the shoulder.

"Silence, girl! What is the matter? Come to your senses!"

"A man! Some one m-m-murdered!"

Every one of us started with terror at that awful word.



Even Papa fell back and looked a trifle discomposed.

“Where ? ” he gasped.

“Upstairs ! In Miss Teresa’s bedroom ! ”

“My bedroom ! ”

“Teresa’s bedroom ! ”

“What did you see ? Control yourself, girl. What did you see ? ”

“The door’s locked, and there’s some one inside *moaning !* ”

“Good Heavens ! ”

With one accord Papa and Mama made for the staircase, and we all followed—Peggy, Hilary, Alice, Ermyntrude, Dick, Geoffrey, and, last of all, Teresa—a very subdued and seared and trembling Teresa.

Up the stairs we went.

Papa banged at the door, rattled the handle, and demanded fiercely, “Who’s inside ? ”

A wail answered him.

He looked alarmed, but he banged again on the door nevertheless.

“Open the door immediately, or I shall burst it in ! ”

Then, and not till then, I came to my senses.

I realised that if I delayed one second longer my father would never forgive me as long as he lived, for I should have made him appear ridiculous.

I flew to him. I seized his arm.

“I locked the door myself,” I said. “Here’s the key. I had it in my pocket all the time.”

“You locked the door ? ”

“Yes, Papa.”

Hastily I put the key in the keyhole, turned the lock, and threw open the door. And there, staring up innocently into our faces, was a little brown dog, that wagged its tail, and made straight for Papa’s patent-

leather shoes, which were so shiny that he probably mistook them for another mirror.

A breathless silence fell over every one, broken eventually by Papa.

“What does this mean ? ” he asked icily. “What dog is this ? What is it doing in your room ? ”

“I left it there.”

“How dare you bring a dog into my house ! ”

“It was s-sent to me ! ”

Then in a flash I saw the inevitable question that would follow, and a sudden impulse seized me—an impulse that I couldn’t define and couldn’t explain—an extraordinary and ridiculous impulse to shield Patrick Hall from my father’s wrath.

“Who sent it to you ? ” said Papa.

And I, yielding to that extraordinary impulse, replied stubbornly, “I don’t know.”

## CHAPTER XII

BY THE BLACK TREES IN THE SQUARE

BUT Papa, with an almost diabolical cleverness, soon found out.

He questioned the servants.

Finally, he pounced upon Sarah, and elicited from her the fact that she had asked the messenger-boy where he came from, and he had told her from a young gentleman at Tindalls' shipping-office in Leadenhall Street.

So back went Peter, my darling curly little dog !

And the letter that accompanied him must have been a pretty desperate affair, judging by the look on Papa's face as he sat dashing it off, while Henry, the dog basket in his arms, stood waiting.

Next day Sarah said to me fiercely :

" You'll come to a bad end, Miss Teresa."

" You were a brick, Sarah, not to tell about that letter ! "

" I'm mighty sorry I didn't ! Here's another ! "

She hauled out a letter from her pink pocket and handed it to me.

" And, mark my words, Miss Teresa—that's the last ! Any more of these goings-on, and I'll tell your father ! "

" It isn't my fault ! " I cried angrily. But she had gone. So, with a face like a lobster, I opened this latest epistle.

"I must see you. I'm going to stand outside your house from half-past six. Please come out and let me speak to you. I shall wait there till you come."

It happened that night that my father and mother had gone to dine with some old family friends, so at eight o'clock—dinner well over—I donned my sealskin coat and toque, slipped my hands into a muff, and let myself noiselessly out of the front door without any one noticing. I gained the street, and there, leaning against a lamp-post right in front of our house, was *he*!

"Go away at once, and never come here again!" was my greeting to him. "It's horrid of you! *Horrid!* My father's furious!"

"Why didn't you keep the dog? Why did you let him send it back? Surely you're old enough to have your own way by now?"

I stood still and glared at him.

"I am not in the habit of taking presents from people I scarcely know," I told him. "And what I've come out here to-night for is to tell you that you must stop worrying me like this. It can't go on. Surely you must see for yourself that it isn't a nice thing for a man to persist in annoying a girl when he sees she doesn't like him. And besides, I'm going away in a week or so. And if you send **any** more letters here there'll be frightful trouble. Simply *frightful!*"

"Where are you going?"

I assumed a withering air.

"I think it's much better that you shouldn't know!"

All this time there we were out in the street, shielded only from the cold north-easterly wind and from prying eyes by the great black trees in the square

that were casting, with unusual condescension, a kindly shadow over us both.

I looked up at him. How big he was! Quite a giant beside me. His face looked young, but very white and determined. What a chin! It might have been made of iron. And the eyes matched it in their extraordinary look of strength.

He leant forward, and put his hand on my arm.

“The sooner you understand me the better, Teresa,” he said quietly. “I love you! And some day or other we must marry—you and I!”

One look I gave him—one terrified, dumb, incredulous look. Then I snatched my arm from his grasp; and, turning, ran like a wild hare down our area steps, out of his reach, out of his sight.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AT THE BINNINGS'

A GREAT grey house in a great garden, walled round with a great grey wall; far off, the sea; nearer, a straggling shipping-port, whose rows of streets did their best to imitate those unknown parts of London that lie about the docks. An unlikely place one might think, for so delightful a home as that of our friends the Binnings. But the fact remained. Everybody that ever came to stay there decided that never was there a jollier, friendlier, happier place than "Pine Lodge," perched on the hill over Southwater.

Admiral Binning was one of my father's oldest friends, and we Martindales always counted it as great good luck that this should be the one house we were allowed to visit ungrudgingly, unhampered by queries, doubts, and the hundred and one obstructions that were generally raised when we were invited to go and stay with anybody else.

The evening I arrived at Pine Lodge, Jean Binning and I were indulging in our usual midnight confab over Jean's bedroom fire.

I, in a pink silk quilted wrapper with my hair in a long thick pigtail, and my toes in pink satin wadded shoes, sat tailor-wise on Jean's beautiful white bear-skin rug, my arms clasped round my knees, while Jean, who was a lazy thing, lay on the sofa in a pale

blue peignoir, leisurely putting her black locks into curling-pins.

"Teresa, do you know you've changed? What's happened to you? You've got a different look."

"Really!"

I felt immensely interested as we all do when we become the subjects of interesting announcements.

"You're prettier! Much prettier!"

"Really!"

I tried to restrain a pleased grin.

"You used to look so sleepy! Now you look wide awake. In fact, between ourselves, Tessie darling, you used to have a rather sluggish look—a somnolent, pondering, heavy, uninteresting look."

"You cat!"

I took off my pink satin slipper and threw it at her, and she dodged and let a curling-pin drop from her mouth.

"Come now! Confess! What's happened? I mean to say—*who is he?*"

"Who's who?"

"Rubbish! You can't deceive me! I know the signs too well!"

She laughed, and with a gentle sidelong movement slid her little silver hand-glass into my lap.

"Look at yourself!" she said, "and tell me what colour your face is!"

But I didn't look.

I knew without looking that I had turned the colour of a peony, though why I should do so I positively could not imagine. Why should I blush? Why should I feel guilty? Why did my mind dart with sleuthlike swiftness to the memory of a big, broad-shouldered young man whose determined face looked down into mine, while black trees cast

their shadows over us in the wind-swept silence of Kensington Square? What had he to do—that young man—with Jean’s impish insinuations?

“You’re in love!” said Jean next moment.

Then, after scrutinising my face for a moment, she went off into a burst of heartless laughter, which made me secretly furious, though I remained calm.

“Look here, Teresa, you needn’t pretend with me. It’s not a bit of good. Everybody falls in love sooner or later. It was bound to come, my girl! Only you’re a mean thing if you don’t tell me all about it.”

“There’s nothing to tell.”

“Why are you getting red then?”

“The fire’s so hot.”

“Fraud! Well, if you won’t come up to the scratch, my dear, I’ll have to! Since you refuse to do the confessing, I’ll have to start. So here goes! Teresa, I’m frightfully and shockingly in love! Bowled over entirely! Got it awfully bad. Don’t you see how much more hair than usual I’m putting up in curlers? And don’t you realise what that means? It means just one thing, my dear—a *young man*!”

“Oh, but you’re always in love with somebody, Jean. I never knew you when you weren’t.”

“This is *real*.”

“It always *is*.”

“Scoffer! All right! You wait till you see him.”

Something seemed to tickle her then, and she went off into another burst of idiotic laughter, while I seized the opportunity to take a side-glance at my face in the glass, noting therein that that horrid scarlet was now subsiding.

Jean, putting in her last curling pin, flung herself back among the dainty white muslin cushions of her wide chintz-covered sofa, and stared up at the



ceiling. Her profile assumed its most charming aspect; her lips of vivid scarlet parted over her white gleaming teeth, while her big dancing eyes of deepest brown grew pensive and tender. She was exquisitely pretty, a long graceful piece of young womanhood in a highly becoming peignoir of pale blue silk and much Valenciennes.

No one would dream to look at her that she was five years older than I. And for my part I never felt the difference. She was great friends with all of us—Peggy, Alice, Ermytrude, and Hilary, but for some reason or another it was I who had always been her special chum.

“Are you really in love, Jean?” I demanded curiously, after a few moments’ dreamy silence.

“Rather!”

“And he—is he in love with you?”

“Too soon to say yet!”

“How often have you met him?”

“Once.”

“Is he dark or fair?”

“Fair.”

“I like fair men.”

“Oh, yours is fair too, is he?”

“Nonsense! Is he tall or short?”

“Tall.”

“Does anybody ever fall in love with a short man?”

“Oh, so yours is tall, too, is he?”

“Now, Jean, don’t be silly. I’m going to bed.”

As a matter of fact I was torn between two conflicting emotions. I wanted to stay here and bask by Jean’s fire and probe her about love. But I hated to be teased. It maddened me—it made me ashamed—to feel that whenever she teased me my thoughts could not keep themselves from the one

person I wanted to forget—the young man I had run away from—and whose letters, coming after that unforgettable night, I had thrown unopened into the fire.

I got up and gathered my pink wrapper about me, simulating a yawn.

“ Good-night, Jean ! ”

“ Good-night, old girl ! To-morrow, as a great treat, I may perhaps allow you to have a peep at *him* ! Only mind—no poaching on my preserves ! ”

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MAN WITH THE DIRTY FACE

THEIR jolly breakfast was over. The Admiral, his blue eyes glinting jovially, was playing with the big black cat on his knee. Mrs. Binning, at the other end of the table, was nodding her pretty grey head over a very long letter from India. Old Cornelia Binning, the Admiral's sister, was being teased and chaffed by her handsome nephew, Arthur, otherwise Commander Binning, R.N., of His Majesty's destroyer "Psyche." Jean and I and Charlie were demolishing, with shameless gusto, some beautiful grapes, sent over from the Canary Isles by another of the Admiral's sons. A big fire blazed and crackled on the wide, old-fashioned hearth, and through the open windows could be seen a magnificent vista of the sloping garden and the sun riding gallantly over the shining surface of the far-off waters.

"Now, girls," said the Admiral, "get your bonnets on."

"All right, Pater!"

"If you want me to take you down to the docks, you must look sharp. I'll be off in ten minutes."

Jean squealed, seized my arm, and dragged me away to get my hat.

"Now you're going to see him!" she told me excitedly.

"I'm overcome at the thought," I answered sarcastically.

"Well, don't you forget what I told you last night."

Off we went down the hill, the Admiral and Jean in front, Arthur and I behind, our footfalls ringing loudly on the quaint cobbled streets as we made our way down to the town, a walk of about half an hour.

"Why this sudden interest in the docks?" asked Arthur curiously.

"Oh, I don't know!" I answered evasively.

I'd be the last one to give Jean away to Arthur, knowing as I did so well the ways of brothers.

The Admiral gathered us all under his wing presently, while Jean came close to me and tucked her hand under my arm.

We crossed a wharf, and, walking up a sloping gangway, found ourselves on board a magnificent new vessel, which Jean informed me had been christened quite recently by Mrs. Binning. There were several people, little groups of visitors, wandering about the deck, and presently I found myself alone, while Jean and the others were talking to some of their friends from the town.

I looked about me. I was wondering if I could discover for myself, unaided, the fascinating young man who was the latest to take Jean's roving and fickle fancy. She was always in love with some one. And as for the people who were in love with her—well, their name was simply legion! When she appeared in a ball-room, men crowded round her like flies, and she was always the most popular girl wherever she went.

Suddenly I gave a little gasp.

Coming down the deck was a man whose eyes were fixed hard on my face, and as he came nearer the recognition in his look changed to a vivid and undisguised delight.

In a flash I took in one startling fact after another. First, he was Patrick Hall; second, he had a black face, his sleeves were rolled up over his elbows, and his hands and arms were like a stoker's; third, he wore a dark-blue overall covered with grease and grime and black paint. And this dirty, dreadful-looking workman was coming up to greet me before the Admiral and Jean who were standing just behind me.

Overcome with confusion, I lost my head, and as he came closer I looked straight away to the right.

Then I strolled past him, my eyes gazing out over the side of the ship, and my head tilted in an attitude of assumed unconsciousness.

"Quick! quick!" said Jean's voice at my elbow soon after. "Father's talking to him! Come along! I'll introduce you!"

I looked, and to my horror I discovered that the man the Admiral was talking to was Patrick Hall, looking perfectly calm and perfectly composed, and wearing his begrimed face and arms and his big dirty overall with the same sublime air of indifference with which he had worn that old grey suit of his at dinner!

Quite distinctly I could hear what he was saying to the Admiral.

"I believe in a man knowing all there is to know, and though I'm only a clerk in a shipping office at present, I've persuaded the heads to let me come down here and do a little stevedoring for the sake of experience. Also I've taken a practical hand in the loading of the vessel. It's a jolly important thing that, sir. And I reckon that if a man wants to get to the top of the tree he had first better examine the roots and see if they're strong enough to bear him!"

All this at the top of his strong, far-carrying voice,

with his dirty face looking with inconceivable security into the Admiral's tough old weather-beaten visage.

"Isn't he a darling?" muttered Jean. "Now, come, Teresa! Come!"

"No, no, Jean! You go! I can't!"

I wrenched my arm from hers.

Turning, I crept away.

My heart was like ice in my breast, and a sense of the most utter meanness invaded me.

Had I possessed a thousand pounds I would have gladly given it could I have wiped out that one moment's contemptible and inexcusable folly when I had cut a man because I thought he looked like a common workman, and was ashamed to have him speak to me before my friends.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE UNLOCKER OF GATES

I WAS glad we were all going to a concert that night, for I wanted distraction. I wanted to get away from my thoughts, and it was the greatest living pianist we were going to hear—Jean, Arthur, and I.

“What is a Great Pianist?” asked Arthur at dinner, glancing round the table for a reply.

“Every one in the world will give you a different description,” said Jean. “Each to his own needs first, and, in proportion as these are satisfied, so is the music-maker great.”

“To me the great one is the one who takes me away from petty thoughts,” said I, keeping my eyes on my plate and thinking of my own smallness in being ashamed of a man because he wore workman’s clothes. “The greatest is the one who absolutely prevents me from thinking at all.”

“Bad art, but high joy,” said Jean. “In Heaven one thinks not, neither does one know bad art from good.”

“Why not judge of him that way as well as any other,” said I, “since music for ever leads Nowhere? It opens all gates, unlocks all doors, gives a wild, fleeting revelation of Everything, then turns you out and leaves you there, alone in darkness, looking towards all things, unable to reach any.”

As we take our seats, the concert is just beginning.

Here he comes, the yellow-haired, the sleek-eyed man with the vague face, that looks as if carven carefully out of a dream. He seats himself, and his yellow head stands out against the black gown of a woman in the row behind the piano. His eye and nose are silhouetted too, the full drooped lid of the artist, the nose that is at once sensitive and generous. And the yellowy moustache and chin-tuft hiding a mouth that is compressed a little, and is graven about with fine pain—this, then, is the Great Player.

So I see him, looking at him for the first time—a vague, yellow face set in yellow hair; gentle, but carrying somewhere between the narrowing lids a hint of tiger-fire.

He plays. Hush! Hush! He plays softly to quieten the house of women. A chord is struck in warning, then a run floats across the hall, hushing all away.

What is he playing? What does it matter? Name it or not, it is *you* who give it its meaning. Well, then, since you demand I will tell you he is playing “*Études Symphoniques*”—Schumann’s.

The Great Player and Schumann; they chase the idea up and down, in and out of Erard, and a faint voice from within whispers that he lacks in some subtle shade of fineness, making his transitions too marked for such a poet.

For such a poet! Ay, there’s the rub. For the poet that he could be, is he quite poet enough?

And then he touches the piano with two “Songs without Words,” slowly, very, *very* slowly, lagging, dreaming.

Will Beethoven wake him?

But that yellow vagueness is not for Beethoven. Music, breathing, and thundering out the highest



metaphysics, the essence of spiritual fervours, the message of a giant brain—these are not for that face carved out of a dream.

But give him Chopin—and the king comes into his own. He takes the piano into his hand like a brush, and paints on the flexible molten brain of his audience a storm, a torture. He dashes it in with a passionless force till the house flees with him in wild flight—but leaving its body here behind it in the hall with the rain beating on the roof—yes, always leaving its body here behind it. He takes the soul, but leaves the body to consciousness.

Then a Ballade, two Preludes, Études, a Mazurka, a Polonaise. They float, they float; they caress the soul. The yellow hair gets in its work, and the tiger-fire flashes with the strange indifferent passion of a poet. His runs are like streaks of silver flung across the spirit.

Runs! Oh, hideous word! The crudeness and clumsiness of the English language can show no uglier example than that word “Runs.” *Runs!*—for that tongue of flame leaping across the piano! *RUNS!*—for that dash of spray in the sunlight! *RUNS!*—for that long, thin streak of lightning that flashes across the heart, firing the inner eye with silver, stealing the breath, leaving one dizzy, dazed, and thrilled.

In the Great Player’s hands a run is like an “Oh!” in some moment of sudden spiritual exaltation.

Just as the poet cries, “O God!” “Oh, my Love!” the Player sends up these silver cries. Hours after I heard him I could see the colour of his runs still. Silver—always silver.

Until I heard him play I never heard the message of a cascade of notes. I saw it as an ornament, and turned aside a little. With the unnecessary cruelty

of the ignorant I called it vulgar, and drew away, admiring, but never knowing, never taking it to myself.

Till he played those Preludes. Then I was punished ; and all my days I'll go the softlier, sadlier, for my crime's sake.

Jean said,

“I don't like the way he lifts his hands ; it's so *affected*.”

But I thought of the runs, and I said to myself,

“For this vague man with the mouth of pain there is some hidden meaning—even to those hands thrown back, held back, posed back, theatrically.”

And I found the meaning after a time. His pose of hand is the expression of his soul, his condition of emotion. Sometimes his hand flies up and remains dead still, the fingers bent. It stays like that for a full moment. Jean says “*Affectation*.” It seems a long, long time before it comes down again. If you don't know what it means, you grow a little uneasy, overstrained ; but if you understand, if you watch his eyes, listen to his music, and get into his region, you will find he is venting himself in those raised hands, just as you bite your lip in sudden danger, just as you open your eyes in great surprise, just as you lift your hands at some dread message. Those taut, raised hands are the expression of his mood.

But *great*—is this Player *great* ?

Not to a craving, exacting imagination, that demands fire and dew together ; that cries for the heavens to be opened and solid earth to be swept from beneath its feet. He plays for ever in a dream. He translates Chopin inimitably, with perfect grace, with despair, with a lovely charm and a veiled passion ; but the homely flower-feeling, the domestic, pure love in Mendelssohn's music, was blurred with a sentimentality

that had no place there. He played those two "Songs without Words" with a drawn-out tenderness that grew thin from very slowness. And in a Beethoven Sonata (Op. 111) the struggle between the Great Player and the greatest musical genius of all time was to the strong. Beethoven conquered; the Player was left behind. He had neither the grandeur of style nor mind for this immortal.

"He plays to women," said Arthur, as we drove home.

"Well, but what then?" I said. "So do all artists; every one who plays to an audience—the poet, the actor, the artist, the writer, the pianist, the singer—it's to women he's appealing, or to the woman in a man. Didn't he appeal to the woman in you, Arthur?"

But I forgot to listen to his answer.

I was wondering what it would be like to go with Patrick Hall to listen to A Great Pianist, to see all gates unlocked, to get that wild, fleeting revelation of Everything, then to be turned out and left alone there—alone in the darkness, at his side.

## CHAPTER XVI

### VERY AWKWARD !

A DISCOMPOSING piece of news awaited me next day.

The Admiral had asked Patrick Hall to dinner !

How could I face meeting him ? Should I apologise ? Should I try to make some mumbling, stumbling explanation ? Or should I simply assume as grand a manner as possible, and try to make him believe I didn't know it was he ? I spent the whole day making up my mind, and unmaking it again.

When dinner-time came, I was the last, the very last, to come down into the drawing-room, and when I got there they were all assembled ; the Admiral and Mrs. Binning looking so genial and well groomed—the ideal host and hostess, he in a black velvet coat, and she in her stiff grey poplin and Honiton laces ; Arthur, very smart and spruce, flirting with a young and pretty widow ; smiling Jean, like a dream in a pale pink gown with a pearl head-dress that threw up the radiant blackness of her hair, the whiteness of her teeth, and the splendid darkness of her eyes. And talking to her was a tall, broad-shouldered person in a very new dress-suit, his hair extra well brushed, and his face shiny from the many ablutions he must have been forced to impose upon himself.

Trailing across the room in my white chiffon frock with a slim green sash I did my best to appear calm and unconcerned.

I went up close to the couple, and in as natural a voice as I could manage, I looked at the young man and smiled.

"Good-evening!" I began. "This is indeed a surprise!"

To my horror he looked at me with absolute blankness!

I went scarlet.

Jean looked wonderingly from one to the other.

"Don't you remember me?" I added hastily.

"I'm afraid my memory is not as good as yours," he answered gravely.

Jean, thinking this was some absurd game of mine, here took the reins in her own hands.

"Let me introduce you. Mr. Hall, Miss Martindale!"

I inclined my head.

Patrick Hall did likewise.

"Mr. Hall saved the Pater's life the other day," said Jean, repeating the story I had already been made acquainted with. "The poor dear's foot slipped, and he fell between the vessel and the wharf. He was wearing a heavy overcoat, and might have been drowned, and Mr. Hall jumped in and got him out. We can never be grateful enough, Mr. Hall."

"It was nothing at all!" he replied gravely, and I was struck by the lack of awkwardness in his manner.

Then Mrs. Binning swept smilingly up to our little group.

"Jean, darling, Colonel Ayrton for you. He's over by the piano. Mr. Hall, will you take Miss Martindale?"

My sensations were mixed. I felt as if I could sink through the floor with chagrin and dismay, and yet I had a curious feeling of relief. All through dinner he

would be at my side. Surely, by then, I could put things right.

In silence he offered me his arm, and in silence I slipped my white-gloved hand within.

We moved towards the door, following the gay and chattering procession.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HE AND I

"How funny that we should go down to dinner together!" I murmured hysterically.

"It must be rather trying for a lady to go in to dinner with a man whom she doesn't know," he answered quietly.

We were all settling ourselves round the table, and as I stole a look about me I thought what a pity it was that anything should ruffle the happy, delightful atmosphere that prevailed always at Pine Lodge. There was the Admiral, ruddy and keen, preparing to thoroughly enjoy himself, with a pretty widow on his left, and a lively matron on his right, both well dressed and full of spirited anticipation. And there was Mrs. Binning, with her grey hair and her grey poplin, emanating happiness just by her presence at the head of the table. Jean and Arthur, those two good-looking young scions of the house, further carried out the family's reputation for liveliness and goodwill, while all the guests wore that contented expression that marks the dinner-party where the menu will be quite excellent, while wit and conversation and laughter will flow unlimitedly, and every one will feel "at home."

I wondered for a moment why Jean had not appropriated Patrick Hall for herself.

Then I saw her wisdom.

She had placed herself opposite on the other side of the table, where her dark charming face shone at him through the roses and candlelight, catching his eye all the time.

I determined to make him talk to me.

Desperately I beat my brain for an opening topic, seeing that he was silently giving himself up to his soup, while all the other men were chatting, or being chatted to by their fair neighbours.

That Patrick Hall should sit there grave and silent seemed suddenly a reflection on my powers of fascination.

I gave a nervous little preliminary cough, bolted a mouthful of hot consommé, and opened fire.

"Tell me, what has become of that darling little Peter?"

"Peter?"

He repeated the word, and favoured me with an expressionless glance.

"Who is Peter?" he asked calmly.

"Oh, you know very well! Why do you pretend? The dog! The little dog you sent me."

"I'm afraid you have a higher opinion of my memory than it deserves."

"Do you mean to say you've forgotten?"

"I forget everything I don't wish to remember."

"Why should you wish to forget Peter?"

"I have absolutely no wishes and no opinions about the things that I've forgotten."

"You must be very clever to forget so easily!"

For the life of me I could not help the note of irritation that sounded in my voice.

"Are you living at Southwater?" he asked, in a casual, I-suppose-I-must-make-conversation manner.

"How absurd! You know perfectly well that I



don't live here. I'm on a visit. Don't you remember that night—that last time I saw you—I told you I was going away on a visit ? ”

“ I'm afraid you're confusing me with some one else ! ”

“ Surely you're not going to deny that you're—you're who you are ? You're not going to pretend that you're not the Mr. Hall who dined at our house in town ? ”

“ I'm certainly going to deny it ! ”

“ On what grounds ? ”

“ On the grounds that the person you allude to no longer exists.”

“ But what has happened to him ? Where is he ? ”

“ Ah, that is not for me to say.”

And he deliberately turned away and entered into conversation with Cornelia Binning on his other side.

I went on with my dinner.

Not for worlds would I let him see that he was upsetting me. So I devoted myself with interest to my sole in white wine, and tried to draw Arthur, who was on my other side, into conversation.

There was always one sure method of capturing Arthur's attention.

“ Hilary's coming down here to stay after I go back.”

Immediately Arthur had eyes and ears for no one but me.

“ It'll be rotten,” he said, “ if I can't get away while she's here.”

“ She'll be awfully disappointed ! ”

“ Will she really ? Oh, you're getting at me, Teresa. You don't mean that. You know very well that Hilary doesn't care a hang whether I'm here or not.”

“ Doesn't she ? ” I laughed provokingly.

He looked at me searchingly, his dark eyes fixed intently on mine.

He seemed to be hanging on my words, on my lips, but not for the reason that I was trying to convey to that big, stern, relentless neighbour of mine. For, yes! Let me confess it! I was deliberately trying to get up the appearance of a violent flirtation between Arthur and myself, just for the sake of piquing Patrick Hall. I bent towards him. He leaned towards me. Our heads were nearly touching. We whispered together, and I laughed. And all the while my guilty heart knew that it was not *I* who was the object of handsome Arthur's attentions, but my little sister Hilary, away in our prison-house in Kensington.

But my ruse was a failure—a rank and abject and uncompromising failure.

For when I peeped round presently I discovered that my big, fair-haired neighbour had had his broad shoulder turned square away from me all the time, and was carrying on an animated discussion with the Admiral down the table about—of all things in the world—agricultural wages!

His voice, so penetrating and unafraid, carried all over the room, and as I listened a sneaking feeling of admiration took possession of me. How well he talked! How forcibly he put his case! How those blue eyes of his gleamed with hidden fire! And what unsuspected magnetism he must possess—this young man whom I in my superb self-satisfaction had so lately been denouncing as awkward, bumptious, impossible. The Admiral leant forward, listening. The pretty widow and the lively matron both fixed their charming eyes on that young, earnest face, while Jean and her Colonel gave over conversation and hung eagerly on his words, and when he

finished, when he had magnificently demonstrated his case for the tillers of the land, a subdued sizzle of approbation went the round of everybody.

"Demosthenes himself couldn't have put the case better," cried Jean to him from across the table.

And her sparkling eyes echoed the coquetry in her voice.

Course followed course, and the end of dinner at last began to appear in sight.

Not a word had passed between me and my neighbour, and a sudden feeling of alarm attacked me. Seated here so cosily at his side, hemmed in as it were with him, I had my great chance to make some attempt at apologising for my miserable behaviour at the docks, but if I did not hurry I should be too late.

"Will you crack a walnut for me?" I asked him hastily, to engage his attention.

"Certainly!"

Disdaining the crackers, he broke the nut between his fingers as if it were an egg-shell, and laid it on my plate.

I whispered hurriedly:

"How wonderfully you did that! What strong fingers you must have!"

"Will you have another?"

"Please!"

I sought for words. This was the crucial moment, and I would—I *must*—seize it, and tell him that I had really hardly recognised him at first that morning, and that I had never meant to cut him, and that he mustn't think so, and mustn't be offended. But when I lifted my head and looked up into his face and our eyes met, I found myself speechless. It was as though my brain was met all silently and imperceptibly by a wall of iron that deliberately turned

back my thoughts, and so bewildered me that I could not utter a single word.

It was as though he were shouting down my wish to apologise.

And yet not one syllable had he uttered !

The whole thing went on in waves between us—brain currents fighting brain currents—and no more extraordinary evidence of his dominating personality could have been offered me than the way in which I found my thoughts deadened, my intentions frustrated, and my words of apology frozen on my lips.

And there was Mrs. Binning looking for Mrs. L'Estrange's eye to give her the mystic signal. Dinner was over. We ladies were rising and *frou-frouing* our silken gowns towards the door. For the present my opportunity was gone.

## CHAPTER XVIII

“QUICKER ! ”

UPSTAIRS in the ball-room, that looked across the Waters, Miss Cornelia was playing the “Chocolate Soldier,” and Arthur and I were waltzing together. The Colonel was having a turn with Mrs. Binning, while the Admiral showed that he had not forgotten the gallant ways of the Navy, with his arm about the pretty widow’s waist.

“Doesn’t Mr. Hall dance ? ” I asked Arthur presently.

“No ! He says he likes looking on.”

Patrick was leaning against the wall at the far end of the room—a grave, stalwart figure, watching us all career with light feet round the shiny parquet floor.

Suddenly Jean, who had been waltzing with little Lieutenant Marshall, came to a standstill near him.

Her pink silken skirts swirled out over his feet.

She placed herself at his side, leaning against the wall, and presently I noted that he was fanning her.

“Quicker, Arthur ! I hate this creepy, old-fashioned waltz ! I wish the music wasn’t so slow ! ”

“Why, what a funny girl you are, Teresa ! You’re always raving against quick waltzes.”

“I used to be ! Nothing changes as quickly as waltzes.”

“Except women’s minds ! ”

“Now, Arthur—don’t be witty with me—it’s wasted!”

“How cross you are to-night, Teresa! What’s ruffled your little feathers?”

“Nonsense! Don’t be silly! I’m thirsty. Let’s go into the dining-room and get some lemon-squash.”

We had to pass Patrick Hall quite close, but he took no notice of us—none whatever.

I gulped down some lemon-squash, while Arthur tackled some barley-water.

“Hurry! Let’s go back!” I cried feverishly. “Somebody’s playing my favourite waltz—‘Tales of Hoffmann.’”

I raced him back to the ball-room as eagerly as I had just raced him away from it.

I danced with Arthur, and afterwards with the Colonel, and then with Lieutenant Marshall.

At the far end of the room Jean was teaching Patrick Hall the Two-step.

I said to Marshall furtively, “Jean doesn’t seem so keen as usual on dancing to-night!”

He laughed his jolly sailor-laugh, and said breezily, “Jean’s got a little thing of her own on to-night!”

At which I glared at him, and thought to myself how insufferably slangy Naval youths could be.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE GIRL IN THE GLASS HOUSE

At the far end of the ball-room a little glassed-in balcony opened out, and in there a faint light shone dim under a pink silk shade, while rows upon rows of flowers—geraniums, fuchsias, lilies, palms, begonias, hydrangeas, bouvardias—filled the place with sweet perfumes and a radiant show of colour. A couple of low wicker chairs were cunningly arranged behind a giant palm, and many a flirtation—so the Admiral was wont to proudly boast—that had begun in that little conservatory had ended in a happy marriage.

I had been dancing till my feet burnt and ached within my thin white satin shoes, and now I was tired, and refused to dance again.

Patrick Hall was talking to the Admiral just at the doorway of the conservatory, while the others were tiring themselves still more with a lively “Judy-walk.”

A sudden inspiration seized me.

I walked into the conservatory and sank down into one of those inviting little chairs.

How sweet the lilies were! How white and starry they looked in this soft pink light! And the giant geraniums, Miss Cornelia’s pride, how superb they were in their scarlet bravery, with their broad, strong green leafage! A tender, dreamy feeling pervaded, and through the glass windows one could see the

lights of shipping flashing red and green across the dark waters. The place seemed to literally cry aloud of tender voices and soft glances. I settled my white skirts about me, gave my hair a little pull and a few pats, and waited.

Yes, deliberately I waited !

The fact that my back was turned to the door meant nothing. For every nerve in my being seemed to be looking towards that door and asking some one to follow me in there.

I said to myself, "He's sure to come !"

My heart began to beat excitedly, so positive was I that he would have to follow me. Why, how could he help it ? He had seen me come in here. He knew I was alone. It was just the place for a lovely talk, and only a few weeks ago he had said to me with his own lips, "I love you, Teresa ! You and I must marry." He would come ! He *must* come ! I should sit there and will him, and will him, and will him. And then he would come. He'd sit in this chair beside me, and the palm would droop above us, and the tender rose-lit isolation of the flower-scented retreat——

A shadow fell and a footstep sounded.

It was a long, long shadow, and my heart gave a wild beat.

Then a voice said brusquely, "Hallo, Teresa ! What are you doing here all by yourself ?"

And there, looking down at me, stood the Admiral !



## CHAPTER XX

“HE DOESN’T MINCE OR BOUNCE!”

At first my disappointment was so keen that I could hardly speak civilly to him.

“Tired of dancing, are you?”

“No, I’m not tired—I want to be by myself!”

“What wretched little chairs these are!” The Admiral let himself down into one stiffly. “You don’t mind a cigar?”

“No!”

“What’s the matter with you, child? Got the hump? You look quite woebegone! Has anybody been jumping on your pretty toes?”

“Of course not! Admiral, where’s Jean?”

“She’s gone up in the tower with young Hall—showing him the stars through my telescope.”

So that was where he was!

Looking at the stars with Jean, while I sat here like a little idiot, making sure he would follow me in.

Cynically I told myself that men were indeed changeable! No woman could have veered round like that. A few weeks ago he had seemed to think there was nobody in the world but me. And now there was nobody in the world but Jean!

“I like that young Hall,” went on the Admiral. “He’s got grit in him, that had.”

“Don’t you think him very conceited?”

“Not a bit of it! He knows what he’s talking

about. He's sure of his facts. He's got a head on his shoulders. I don't call a man conceited who voluntarily undertakes dirty work like stevedoring a ship for the sake of acquainting himself with the details of his line of business."

"His manners are not very good."

"What do you mean—not good! If you mean he's not a ninny or a manikin, you're right. But mark my words, Teresa, my girl, young Hall is a man who's going to *do* something! I like his manners. He doesn't mince and bounce and put on frills. His brain's too full of ideas for flummery of that kind. Young men like that are all too rare, and you mark my words, Teresa, she'll be a jolly lucky girl who gets him!"

"Oh, good-night, Admiral!" said a pettish voice. "I'm dead tired. I'm off to bed."

I flounced away, and as I shut my bedroom door behind me—with a bang, I'm afraid—I said to myself nastily that it was a good thing the Admiral liked him, as he would probably be having him for a son-in-law!

But ten minutes later I opened my door and came out again. I'd had enough of myself. With quick light footsteps I ran downstairs, knowing full well that the Binning household would not be in bed for ages, and feeling myself overcome with a longing to be among them all again.

The last guests had just departed, Patrick Hall and Marshall going off together.

Jean slipped her arm through mine, and soon we all made our way into the dining-room, where, in accordance with the invariable Binning custom, we sat round the table and had supper and talked over things comfortably, in a frank and discursive way, just among ourselves. The Admiral sipped his whisky - and -

water, Jean and I had cocoa and sandwiches, Miss Cornelia took a little barley-water and a biscuit, Arthur vigorously attacked cold tongue and salad, washed down with beer, Charlie demolished the remains of a pigeon-pie, Mrs. Binning set conventions boldly at defiance with a cup of tea which she declared sent her to sleep. An ineffable soothing feeling of being let alone pervaded us all, and we gave our tongues free rein, and said exactly what we thought of every one, and all the while I listened eagerly to hear what they would say of Patrick Hall.

Into this haven a servant entered, carrying a telegram on a silver salver.

“ For Miss Martindale.”

My trembling fingers tore at a little brown envelope. Startling words danced before my eyes.

“ Father dangerously ill come home at once.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### GOING UP TO LONDON

CAN anything on earth look more inexpressibly dreary than a seaport town at six o'clock on a grey muffled winter's morning when the smoke from the factories fights sullenly against the fog, when the smell of fish mingles strongly with odours of tar, creosote, and hemp, when the cobbled pavements are dark and slimy underfoot, and gloomy-eyed women creep about buying penn'orths of tea for the dock-labouring husbands' breakfasts? I looked from the window of the fly in which I was driving to the station accompanied by the Admiral, then I shivered and drew my head in sharply and let my eyes rest for comfort on that dear old weather-beaten face at my side.

"Oh, Admiral, how good of you to come with me!"

"Nonsense, my dear! You don't suppose I should let you travel alone?"

"I'm awfully glad you're with me. And awfully grateful too!"

"Nonsense! You forget, Teresa, that James Martindale and I were boys together. I can guess what your anxiety is, poor child, but, believe me, mine is almost equally strong. Poor James! Poor James! Well, well, well! It seems only yesterday that we were boys of nine and ten, reading '*Omnia Gallia divisa est*' together for the first time."

He took my hand and squeezed it hard.

“ We must hope for the best,” he said, and I noticed with amazement that there was a little break in his voice, as though he were really and truly fond of that dread stern parent of mine, whom I, alas ! had never been able somehow to associate with the idea of friendship or affection.

At Southwater Station we found ourselves with a good twenty minutes to wait.

The train, in fact, was not yet at the platform. A darkness as of midnight prevailed, and the dim glimmer of the station lights seemed merely to increase the general darkness and lugubriousness of the morning.

We paced up and down the station, the Admiral and I, trying to keep our feet warm. My heart was like lead. I suppose I was partly under the influence of the depressing weather, and then I was very, very tired. I had scarcely fallen asleep before they awakened me to get up. And mingled with the tiredness and the anxiety about my father was a dull gnawing secret pain that sometimes receded into the background, but yet contrived all the while to make me aware of its presence. What was it, this pain ? Simply the fact, bluntly put—that I was leaving a certain young man behind me, and that I was still condemned, still unforgiven.

The Admiral’s voice broke in on me.

“ Why, there’s young Hall ! ” he said.

“ Where ? ”

I fairly jumped with surprise, so strangely were my thoughts continued.

“ On the right there, looking after those cases.”

Sure enough he was there, in a big grey overcoat, throttled with a hideous brown muffler, a hat of dark green felt jammed down over his ears.

Recognising us at that moment, he came over to us,

and the Admiral briefly explained in a few low hurried words what was happening

“So we’re going up to London, Teresa and I! And you, Hall, what are you doing here at this hour of the day, or night rather!”

“I’m going up to town too. I’ve got some cases here belonging to my firm. I have to see them through.”

He turned and looked at me.

“It’s a nasty morning to be travelling,” he said gravely. “You must have a footwarmer.”

The train came into the platform just then, and the Admiral chose our compartment.

“Where would you like to sit, Teresa? By the window or not?”

“You sit by the window, Admiral. I know you like that. And I’ll sit by you.”

“Very well!”

We got in and took our places, and presently Patrick Hall appeared, accompanied by a porter bearing a footwarmer, which was deposited under my feet.

“It was very kind of you to trouble!” I said faintly.

“Come along in with us!” urged the Admiral’s loud, cheery tones. “It’s not good for any man to travel alone at six o’clock on a winter’s morning. We’ll keep each other company in our gloom!”

But as soon as the train started the Admiral promptly fell sound asleep, drawing his great coat up around his ears, and dropping into slumber with a swiftness that suggested long years of naval discipline, of falling asleep at a moment’s notice, and waking up ditto.

With a noiseless movement the young man opposite came over and seated himself at my side.

“I tried to get you a cup of hot coffee,” he said, in a low voice, “but there wasn’t any to be had.”

I wanted to thank him, but I found a lump had come into my throat, so I turned my head aside and gazed at the dark, sad country rushing by outside the window, and a mist swam over everything for a moment or two. But it was not unhappiness that brought that mist before my eyes and the lump into my throat. It could not have been unhappiness. For, as the train rushed on and I sat there cosily sandwiched between my two companions, a strange feeling of content that was almost sweetness suffused me, and if the journey had gone on and on until Eternity I should have been glad—quite unmistakably glad!

The rest of the time was passed in silence, the Admiral fast asleep, Patrick Hall buried in a technical magazine that had pictures and diagrams of ships, and maps, and tables, as I saw when my eye took swift surreptitious peeps in that direction. Never once did he address me, never once did I speak; for though I was happy in that strange, unaccountable way I was desperately, almost stupefyingly, tired, and ever and anon there would sweep over me a dull and sinister foreboding of what might be happening at this very moment—or what might have already happened—in our big grey house at Kensington, where Death was hovering, making his first call on the Martindale family, who had so far escaped the sweep of his raven pinions.

Waterloo at last!

The Admiral, with a startling shiver, woke up, exclaiming loudly, "What's the matter?" Then he added amazedly, "Jiggered if I haven't been to sleep!"

He got out, and the gloom of the great London terminus bore down upon us.

"Now we must find a taxi," said the Admiral, looking about him in perplexity.

"There are never any taxis at Waterloo!" ex-

claimed the younger man. "Unless you don't want them. I'll get one out in the street and send it along for you."

"Oh, are you leaving us now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, good-bye to you, Hall!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

"We hope to see you again soon. When are you coming back to Southwater?"

"This evening, I expect."

"That's good! Well, drop in at Pine Lodge whenever you've a spare hour. You'll be most welcome—most welcome, I assure you."

I listened to their conversation with a curious dull, detached feeling, seeing images of dark, dainty Jean looking at the stars with him through her father's telescope, teaching him to waltz, or sitting alone with him in the dreamy, tender isolation of that flower-scented, dusky conservatory. And I—I was going back to a house of illness and gloom—perhaps death. Then, suddenly overcome with a savage disgust at myself, I gave myself a fierce mental shake. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," I said inwardly. "Your poor father's ill! You ought to think of nothing else!" So hard did I shake myself that I actually shook up a new and unexpected idea, which was that Patrick would be bound to come to our house now—he would be bound to make inquiries after my father. I hugged the cold comfort of that to my breast.

"Good-bye, Miss Martindale!" Patrick was looking at me, and his face had a grey, strained appearance, as though sleep had visited him for an even shorter period than the Admiral and myself. "I do hope you'll have better news when you get home!"



He hurried away, and was soon out of sight, swallowed up in the raw, grey winter morning, while we waited for the taxi.

I stood dead still beside the Admiral, scarcely breathing, my eyes straining as long as I could see after that retreating figure that never paused or sent a backward glance, but went on and on relentlessly, as if determined to pass out of my sight as swiftly as possible.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A LEAF FROM TERESA'S DIARY

EIGHT weeks have gone by. Eight weeks ! It seems incredible, and if any one had told me that eight weeks would pass without a word or sign of Patrick Hall I should have found it hard, indeed, to believe them. But there it is. There's the truth ! Papa's illness rose and fell, following a continuous fluctuation while the Dread Messenger still hovered, waiting persistently to see if he could claim his prey. And then the crisis came and was turned, and back towards convalescence our invalid came creeping with slow, uncertain footsteps. It was a long, hard fight. Over and over again the doctors gave up hope, but a brave woman with a heart of iron and a sweet Madonna face was fighting too, and her strength and sweetness won, and to-day—this very morning—Mama had the divine satisfaction of setting off for Cannes with Papa in her charge.

Eight weeks !

The silver card-basket in the hall has long since overflowed, and its contents been taken away by Sarah to make room for others, so continuous has been the stream of callers to inquire "How is Mr. Martindale to-day ?"

There were three days when the Admiral almost lived here—the dear old faithful Admiral, looking as if he were ready to break up himself, so deep was

his attachment to that unconscious figure in the big back bedroom on the first floor.

And Jean came again and again and again, and Arthur, who was tied to his ship, wrote to one of us every day—generally to Hilary be it said—begging us all to keep up our “pecker.”

As for Lord Creay, who had been hopelessly in love with Peggy for ever so long, he practically inhabited our doorstep, until one dark, bleak afternoon when Peggy gave way, and cried on his shoulder in the hall, and thereafter they were engaged—those two—and Bobbie is now more or less inhabiting our drawing-room. He says they are to be married as soon as Papa and Mama are home again, unless Peggy will condescend to elope with him in the meantime. How happy they are! Quite idiotically happy I call it!

Yes, all these people and never one word from Patrick Hall.

It makes me mad to think of the foolish things I've done during those eight weeks; the way I've started at the sound of a knock; the way I've hung over the letters; the way I've lurked about the drawing-room windows, gazing down the winter-stricken street as if I imagined that by gazing hard enough I would call up a certain big, fair-haired young man, with an iron jaw, who would come hurrying along till he reached the Martindales' house, and then he would knock and ring, and then—bah! It makes me ill to think what a fool I've been making of myself!

All the same I should think that common courtesy would have prompted him to call at least once.

Not for my sake, of course, but simply for the sake of common courtesy.

Well, I've come to a conclusion. I'm going to put him out of my mind. From this very moment I'm

going to forget him. He really isn't worth bothering about when one comes to think over it calmly. For if he had been a nice man he never could have acted as he has done. First, he simply plagued me with his visits, his letters, his presents. I used to be positively afraid to turn round for fear I should meet him ! It *always* was "When can I see you ? " or "I must see you !" always flowers, presents, invitations to theatres. I can't understand how any man could be so rude as to let a girl see that he had changed so quickly. Well, as I said before, henceforth and for ever, I absolutely *refuse* to let him into my thoughts. I've done with him for ever !

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A WALK IN THE DARK

ON a certain Friday night some three weeks after my parents' departure, there came sweeping over me an unmistakable fit of the blues. Bobbie Creay had been to dinner that night, and also Arthur Binning, and perhaps the sight of Peggy's and Hilary's gay, excited faces had something to do with my depression. Then, after dinner, when I went into the drawing-room intending to play Chopin by way of consoling myself, I found Peggy and Creay seated on a little sofa before the fire, and with a groan I fled, wishing all lovers at the bottom of the sea. I carried my music up to the schoolroom, where a rather cracked old Collard & Collard still held sway. But the leaping firelight there revealed Hilary and Arthur standing very close together and engaged in the profitable occupation of gazing into each other's eyes.

In a temper I ran up to my room, put on my hat and jacket, and let myself quietly out of the big front door.

While the cat's away the mice will play, I thought to myself spitefully. And as there was nothing else that I could do I would go for a walk in the dark.

I walked along quickly, and soon found myself in Kensington High Street with its glitter of brilliantly lighted shops. It was a new experience for me to be out alone at that hour, but I felt as if new experiences

were what I wanted. I was dead tired of the ordinary dull level of things. Trudging along under the stars that sparkled in the dark-blue heavy sky, my thoughts began turning involuntarily in a direction that I really did not wish them to take. Why was that man so obdurate with me ? Why was he so unforgiving to me ? Why could he not play the magnanimous and overlook—forget—that moment of folly that had overtaken me at the Southwater Docks ? Was he too vain ? Had I wounded his conceit too bitterly ? Or was he merely utterly indifferent ? Did it mean nothing to him that I had behaved like a precious little snob ? Or was he really deeply and intensely hurt ? Was he disappointed in me as a woman ? Had he taken to despising me, when only so short a time before he had told me he loved me ?

If only I could see him and have it out with him.

I knew that he was in town, for weeks ago Jean told me that he had left Southwater and taken a small bachelor's flat in Bloomsbury. She even told me the address—Albany Chambers, Great Russell Street—and his flat, Jean said, was on the ground floor.

And now a curious thing happened. Led by my thoughts I walked steadily onwards ; on and on until at last I found myself in Park Lane. In a sort of dreamlike way I turned to the right, got into Oxford Street, and continued my progress towards Oxford Circus, telling myself all the time that I was only looking at the shops. But at Oxford Circus, instead of hailing a bus and driving back homewards, I plunged hastily forward, past Peter Robinson's, past Frascati's, past the glitter and noise and crowds of Tottenham Court Road.

A few moments later and I found myself in a wide, dark, quiet street with huge, dignified buildings facing

the great grey pile of the British Museum. I said then tartly to myself that I wanted to see what unknown, mysterious Bloomsbury was like at night.

I glanced about me furtively.

I ignored the fact that I was really searching desperately for the words "Albany Chambers." But all the same I knew that once I saw that name and had really beheld with my own eyes the dwelling where he lived, I would turn round and scuttle home as quickly as possible.

But how the wind howled over here! How it lashed the bare black trees! With what a fierce fury those dark massed clouds went scudding over the heavens! A terrific flash of lightning blazed across the sky, followed by a deafening intonation of thunder that seemed to shake the very foundations of the world.

Stricken with idiotic terror I came to a standstill.

Then a man who was hurrying round a corner nearly knocked me down.

Such a big, comfortable, shielding-looking man, wearing a vast grey overcoat with a hideous muffler tossed German-wise across his shoulder, and a black bowler hat rammed down very tight on his forehead.

My pale face looked up into his, while he, equally pale, stared down at me as if I were a ghost.

"I'm—I'm out for a walk," I began, but I never finished my sentence, for another deafening peal of thunder sounded, and I lurched forward and clutched his arm. "What awful thunder! Oh, I'm so frightened!" I gasped.

"Thunder won't hurt you. Come, don't be frightened. Tell me what you were going to do."

"Oh, if I could only get inside somewhere!" I muttered hysterically, as the elements began a louder

and fiercer battle above our heads, the lightning turning the black street to a lime-lit vivid picture, very beautiful, but, oh ! how frightening !

“ I’ll see if I can get you a taxi,” he said soothingly.

“ Oh, don’t leave me—don’t leave me ! ” I implored him frantically. “ I shall die if you leave me.”

Just then rain began to fall—rain of a madness and fury to match the lightning and thunder in the skies. In great, cruel, heavy drops it pelted in our faces, swiftly turning to stinging hail.

“ There’s nothing for it but for you to take refuge with me until the storm blows over,” my companion exclaimed determinedly. “ I’ve rooms just here. Just up these steps. You can sit down for a few minutes till the lightning stops.”

He took my arm and hurried me up the steps.

As he put his key in the latch, he turned and looked at me, and said in a cool, matter-of-fact voice,

“ I really oughtn’t to let you come in here, but I see nothing else for it ! ”

His words passed over me like chaff.

The one and only thing I wanted was to get inside out of sight of the lightning, which had had a most cruelly unnerving effect upon my system ever since I could remember.

I crept in after him.

At the door I heard a clock down the street striking nine.



## CHAPTER XXIV

“ WHO DOES YOUR WASHING-UP ? ”

“ I’LL set light to the fire. I always leave it ready before I start in the morning,” he said.

“ But haven’t you any one to look after you or do things for you ? ”

“ I don’t want any one. I like doing things for myself.”

“ But your meals——”

“ I get my breakfast myself. I have dinner in the middle of the day in the city—a good square meal. I get my own supper. Or if I’m too lazy to do that there are always heaps of restaurants.”

“ But who does your washing-up and dusting and all the rest of it ? ”

“ Oh, I don’t bother about dusting. And as for washing-up I just put things under the tap and leave them to dry. And every Saturday afternoon I have a woman in for a couple of hours to give a scrub round generally.”

“ Do you mean to say you make your own bed ? ”

“ Rather ! ”

He was down on his knees lighting the fire, which was emitting cheerful crackling little noises as the flames caught the wood and the wood caught the coal, and a gentle, grateful warmth began to steal through the cold, bare room. Outside the rain was beating like mad on the window-panes, and claps of thunder

sounded at intervals. But the blinds were down, and the lightning was mercifully shut out from my sight.

“ Sit here ! ”

He pulled a chair near the fire, and I sank into it, feeling half dazed with the strangeness of the situation.

He stood and gloomed down at me.

“ You’ve really no right at all to be here,” he said seriously. “ But what could I do ? Women are funny things. I couldn’t let you be driven mad by that lightning and thunder. And as long as nobody sees you it won’t matter.”

“ That’s a point of view that I should never have suspected you of taking,” I told him argumentatively, more for the pleasure of talking to him and watching his face and hearing his voice than for anything else. “ The last thing I should have imagined of you is that you’d think anything was all right so long as it wasn’t found out.”

“ Then you must have thought me a fool ! ” he said succinctly. “ I certainly believe in not running foolishly against appearances.”

“ I thought you didn’t care a bit about appearances.”

“ I may not care for them for myself, but I care for them for—for you ! ”

“ For *me* ! ”

“ For any woman.”

“ Oh, I see ! ”

“ Because no woman is fitted to take care of herself.”

“ Then if she is so very difficult to take care of, what sort of superior being would be capable of the task ? ”

“ A man,” he answered briefly.

“ Evidently you hold the old-fashioned notion that women want looking after by men.”

“ I should think they do ! ”

He seated himself on a stiff, uncomfortable chair on the other side of the fireplace, and asked me if I would mind him smoking a pipe.

“ I don’t think this storm will last long,” he said, his blue eyes looking at me through clouds of smoke. “ And then I’ll find a taxi for you, and send you safely home.”

“ Mr. Hall ! ”

“ Yes ? ”

“ I want to ask you something. How was it you never came to ask after my father when he was ill ? ”

“ Why should I ? ”

He looked amazed at my question.

“ Every one else did ! ”

“ I never thought of it.”

“ It would only have been common courtesy.”

“ It never once occurred to me to do so ! ”

“ I think it was very—a little odd ! ”

“ I don’t think so. I scarcely know Mr. Martindale. I haven’t the slightest interest in him. He means nothing to me whatever. Why should I assume a sentimental interest in him when I didn’t feel it ? ”

“ Oh, of course—if it’s like that——”

“ You see, I’m not a sentimentalist. I loathe humbug. I wouldn’t dream of fussing over a man I didn’t care two straws about. Besides, what good would it do him ? What difference could it possibly have made to Mr. Martindale if I had called to inquire after him ? ”

“ Oh, I can’t argue with you ! You’re so matter of fact ! ”

“ I’m glad to hear it.”

"Most people hate being called matter of fact," I told him irritably, aggravated by his tone, although my brain was already insisting that it was splendid of him to be so true and sincere, so free from humbug, so unspoiled by the sentimental taint that runs through so many men and women of the day, substituting veneer for kindness, hypocrisy for genuine unselfishness, and deceit for affection.

"Well, you, Miss Martindale, what are you? Are you matter of fact?"

"Sometimes I am. Papa has brought us up to be so."

"And you, of course, would never dream of being or doing anything outside the traditions of your family."

"Wouldn't I?"

"Present cases always excepted!"

"Yes, I think Papa would hardly approve of my—my being here! . . . But I don't care. . . . I'm glad I'm here. . . . Yes, indeed I am! I'm simply frightfully glad. . . ." I took my courage in my hands all in an instant, and looked across into his face. . . .

"At last I've got a chance of saying something to you that's been weighing most frightfully on my mind ever since that day I met you on board the 'Atalanta.' . . . Oh, you must know what I want to say! . . . I want you to forgive me! . . ."

"Why should I forgive you?"

His query absolutely flabbergasted me.

"Come! Tell me without bunkum or humbug, Miss Martindale, why should I forgive you? Can you give me one single, common-sense reason for my doing so?"

"'To err is human, to forgive divine!'" flashed into my brain, and I told it him.

"Besides, what have I to forgive? You had every

right to do as you chose. Let's examine the case calmly. You saw me there in a workman's get-up with a dirty face and dirty hands, and you didn't care to recognise me. Well, why should you recognise me if you didn't want to ? ”

“ Oh, don't talk to me like that ! Don't, don't ! It's hateful of you ! You know perfectly well I've been simply eaten up with disgust at myself ever since. Yes, disgust ! It's the only word for it. I can't think—I never shall be able to think—how I could have behaved like that. . . . For really and truly I'm not a snob. . . . If you only knew me, I'm sure you'd agree with me. . . . I honour you and respect you in my heart a million times more for doing things like that. . . . But everybody, I suppose, has moments of crass stupidity when they do the wrong things and suffer for them afterwards.”

“ But you, Miss Martindale, you don't mean to say you've suffered for that slight and very natural action of yours in not recognising a man with a smoke-black face and a workman's overall ? ”

“ Haven't I ? ”

I stared away from him, fixing my eyes fiercely on the fire, and overcome with a sudden awful dread that tears might glitter on my eyelashes.

There was a long, long silence.

Then a voice said, with a hushed, incredible gentleness, “ I'm the last person in the world to want to make you suffer ! ”

“ You have ! ” I told him recklessly.

“ I never dreamt of it ! ”

“ Did you think I was made of stone ? ”

“ I didn't think you cared one way or the other ! ”

“ I hated you to scorn me ! ”

“ Did I scorn you, I wonder ? ”

He smoked his pipe slowly and ruminatingly, watching the glowing coals.

"Come, be honest!" I said, a little bitterly. "Resort to your straightforwardness—your hatred of humbug—tell me straight out that you despised me!"

"I suppose I did!" he answered slowly. "I suppose I did!"

"Oh, how could you! How cruel of you!" I started to my feet.

"What a woman you are! You first urge me to tell you the truth, and then you're angry with me. Well, listen. . . . Let's have it out to the bitter end . . . . I did despise you, and that's the truth of it. . . . I suppose I'd put you on a pedestal, high, high, oh, so very high up! . . . Up among the saints perhaps. . . . Up in the fine ether, too rare perhaps for any mortal woman to breathe in. . . . In a word, I made a fool of myself over you. . . . And that day on the 'Atalanta,' when I saw how you were capable of treating me, I got a shock that seemed to open my eyes so wide that I felt as if I never could close them again. . . . The miracle of womanhood that you had been representing to me turned into common clay. . . . But there! Every man has to go through his experience. Why should I jib at mine? You're just a woman after all! I was the culpable one really, because I had insisted that you were something else!"

He had risen, and was standing beside me, looking down into my face with searching, scrutinising eyes.

"I never dreamed that I was on a pedestal!" I whispered brokenly.

A gleam of humour showed in his eyes.

"If you had dreamed it, what would you have done?"

"I would have stayed there!"

He looked at me for a moment, then turned away, and, walking to the window, lifted the blind a little and peered out into the night.

How grateful I was for his action !

Another moment and I should certainly have cried !

“ It’s still raining cats and dogs ! ” he said, coming back to me. “ Listen to it ! I wonder it doesn’t break the glass of the window-panes. You’ll have to stay a bit longer. ”

He poked the fire and put some more coal on.

“ Would you like a cup of cocoa ? ” he asked me suddenly.

“ I should love one ! ”

“ Good ! Sit there, and I’ll make it. ”

“ Can’t I help you ? ”

“ If you like. Come along, and I’ll show you my kitchen. There’s just room to swing a cat in it ! ”

It was a tiny cupboard of a place, with a little gas-stove, a sink, a plate-rack, and a few shelves. Everything was in hopeless confusion from my point of view, but my host seemed perfectly pleased. I mixed the cocoa to a paste, with some preserved milk, while he found cups and saucers and some biscuits.

As we were going back to the sitting-room, I with the biscuits, he with the cocoa, I glanced up at him and caught him looking at me with such a nice, kindly, *human* glance, so different from his usual cold, unfriendly look, that I gave a little smile.

“ This is fun ! ” I said, sipping my cocoa slowly, and thinking it was the nicest I’d ever tasted.

“ You think it’s fun because it’s an adventure, but you wouldn’t like it for always ! ”

“ Wouldn’t I ? ”

And then I found myself going scarlet—terribly,

painfully scarlet, and I'm sure my very nose must have blazed under that cruel, tell-tale blush.

He got up and came over to me. He was so near that I could smell the pipe scent about his coat. And all in a moment there came sweeping over me a mad, tumultuous wonder as to what it would be like to be held in those arms, to be snatched up and cradled close to that strong heart, to feel that determined face coming closer to mine, and closer still. . . .

I wanted to look away, but something stronger than myself made me look at him.

Our eyes met.

A long, long endless glance it was. . . . It went on and on. . . .

Then, with a sudden sharp and wholly unexpected movement he drew himself up, set his lips, turned hurriedly away.

He walked across the room, picked up his hat and coat, and got himself into them.

"I'm going to take you home!" he said, in a cold, firm voice. "It's ten o'clock! You mustn't stay here any longer! And the lightning and thunder have quite ceased!"

In dead silence, without another word, we made our way out of the flat.

As we came out, the same clock that had been striking nine as we came in was now striking ten.



## CHAPTER XXV

### HER HAND IN HIS

It was still raining, and the long wet street shone with a million gleaming golden facets as the lamp-light mirrored itself on the shining surfaces. Cabs and taxis and four-wheelers were flying in all directions, and up and down the street sounded the shrill blowing of whistles, as people vainly endeavoured to summon vehicles.

"And you've got no umbrella! How idiotic of me not to notice!"

"But here's a taxi—look! It's empty!"

My voice bubbled over with irrepressible happiness.

He opened the door for me as the taxi came to a standstill by the curb-stone, and gently helped me in.

He stood at the doorway looking in at me.

"Are you afraid to go home alone?"

A moment's delicious hesitation.

"Yes!" I told him.

He laughed at that, and the sound of his laughter sent a thrill through me. Next moment he had stepped in after me, the door was shut, and we were flying away westwards.

"You're sure you're afraid to go home alone?"

"Quite sure!"

"Give me your hand. . . . What a tiny, tiny paw. . . . May I really hold it? . . ."

It was swallowed up in his two big hands as he spoke.

"Teresa, would you like to be friends with me?"

"Perhaps."

"What a cold little guarded answer! How long will it take you to make up your mind?"

"You haven't told me if you've forgiven me!"

"Hush! Don't say such a thing! Haven't I been watching your eyes all the evening? All the while you've been sitting there by the fireside I've been wondering one thing—if you would ever kiss me! . . . I love you. . . . You know it. . . . I'm no good at love-making. . . . I only know that I would go through Heaven and Hell to win you. . . . And you—your hand is in mine. . . . You've left it there. . . . That does mean something, doesn't it? . . . What does it mean, dear? Tell me, what does it mean?"

"I don't know," is what I was beginning to say as I turned my head towards him.

But the words were never uttered. I found they stuck in my throat and refused to come out.

Then almost at the same moment it seemed our taxi came to a stop before the grey house in Kensington Square, and the journey was incredibly over.

"I shall come to-morrow as soon as I can get away from the city. I must see your father!"

"My father's away!"

"Well, I must see you. Anyhow, I'm coming! An armed guard itself wouldn't keep me from you!"

Without a word I fled down the area steps and made a breathless entrance by way of the scullery door.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### HOW TERESA CAME TO PROMISE

DOWN they all come off their pedestals, shelves, and niches—Napoleon, Garibaldi, Cromwell, Disraeli, Nelson—the whole gamut. Down they come. I sweep them away with firm, unfaltering fingers. I've done with them. I want them no more. Henceforth and for ever I've a hero of my own! Need I tell his name? He is young and tall and strong, with a splendid frame, eyes of piercing blue, rough, fair hair that never keeps in order, an undaunted mouth, and a chin that was made for the battle of life. So farewell, Napoleon, good-bye, Cromwell and Disraeli, Garibaldi and all the rest of you—good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!

I was thinking this as I stood before my looking-glass at four o'clock the next afternoon.

While I made my hair into a big fair chignon with long strands of hair artistically swathed round to keep it in order, I was callously demolishing all my old-time gods.

And yet I was smiling. My eyes were shining, and I positively had to look away every now and then in shame—such a tell-tale, betraying face was reflected in the mirror.

Couldn't anybody with two eyes in their head see that that girl there was in love? She was! Indeed she was! And she knew it. And the knowledge was filling her with an immense wonder and a sense of

awed mystery, as fine and indescribable as the mystery of the tides and the dawns and the sunsets, the coming of green to the trees in spring, the arrival of the swallows, the pale, inimitable mauve of the first lilac, to me the loveliest thing that the great kind Creator ever deigned to grace our little earthly gardens with. In love! In love! Yes, there it was! But instead of thinking about it I must dress. Any minute he might come! And what should I wear? What did I look nicest in? What would he like best?

Eventually, after much mental strain and many and varied indecisions, I decided on a white voile, simple and clinging, made with a turn-down collar of black velvet and turned-up cuffs of the same on the dainty elbow sleeves. I fastened a string of pearls round my neck. Then I put a little—a very little—powder on my nose, and just one drop of scent.

I thought to myself as I held the bottle against my thumb and pressed my thumb against my throat, that scent was a delicious, delightful thing, if women only had the sense not to use too much of it. Give most women a bottle of scent, and they inundate themselves, and that's fatal. One drop is as much as any one should allow. Many things become obnoxious if you have too much of them—nothing more so than beautiful perfume, and I who have always loved everything fragrant and sweet was very careful how I handled the various little cut-glass bottles on my toilet-table.

I flew down the stairs, and hastily entered the drawing-room.

I sat on the sofa first; a trifle stiff, with my little natty black-and-silver striped shoes resting demurely on the pink drawing-room carpet. Then I got up and stood by the fire, looking down into the warm

red glowing coals. Then I moved away to the piano, and tried playing some plaintive music of Arensky's, but my fingers were all thumbs, and my eyes kept fixing themselves on the door, so I soon gave that up. Restlessly I roamed about, touching a photo here and some violets there, opening a book and looking at it without seeing anything, and putting it down without knowing where. Finally I went to the window and hid myself behind a curtain, letting my eyes wander at their absurd and ridiculous will up and down the street, searching for one particular grey overcoat.

It happened the others were all out this particular afternoon, for which, needless to say, I was devoutly thankful. Peggy and Creay had motored down to Brighton, tempted by the brilliancy of the sunlight; and partly by way of chaperon, partly out of good humour, they had filled Creay's car up with our youngsters—Geoffrey, Dick, Alice, and Ermyntude, lunching them at the Metropole, and taking them afterwards out to the Devil's Dyke to the famous view over five counties, and the equally famous haunt of poor Gipsy Lee, whose fortune-telling days are now for ever ended. Hilary was away at Pine Lodge, to Arthur's supreme delight. No one would be home till dinner-time. As for our real chaperon, old Aunt Anna, Mama's eldest sister, we were perpetually forgetting her existence, so beautifully did she leave us alone while she busied herself with her unceasing meetings and committees and boards in the cause of her beloved Women's Suffrage. An admirable chaperon surely; for since Aunt Anna had come to our house Peggy's engagement had strengthened as it were, Hilary's had come to the surface, and mine——

What nonsense!

I found myself picturing just how he would look when I first should catch sight of him, and my heart beat madly. I knew his face would be lit up with an extraordinary radiance such as only a very young and very sombre face could wear ; his eyes would sparkle ; the hard, stern lines of his lips would be softened ; and how quick and ringing his step would be as he sped up our washed-white steps and rang an authoritative peal at our polished, well-kept bell !

Then all of a sudden I saw him.

I can hardly say why it was, but quite distinctly my first glimpse of him gave me a sharp and unmistakable shock.

He was walking slowly—very, very slowly.

That was the first thing I noticed.

His face was pale almost to greyness, and instead of the joyous look he wore an expression of acute anxiety.

That was the second thing I noticed.

He looked as if ten years at least had passed over his head since last night ; he was drawn, haggard, lined ; instead of a joyful lover he looked the most glum and miserable being you could possibly see, and, while he paused on the steps waiting for the door to be opened, he cast a swift, furtive glance in all directions as if afraid to be seen waiting at our door.

And that was the third thing I noticed.

But before I had time to think any further he was being ushered into the room, the door was closed, and we stood there face to face.

My heart beat suffocatingly. It was one thing to think of him ; it was another to be here beside him.

But to my intense amazement he looked even more miserable at close range than he had done at a distance.

His first words were paralysing, and I could scarcely believe my ears.

“By rights I oughtn’t to have come, but I couldn’t help it.”

“Couldn’t help it ! ”

I stiffened involuntarily.

“No. But it had to be. I had to come.”

“I hope you’re not implying that you’ve come against your will ! ”

“Yes, I am. It is against my will. If I could have helped it, nothing on earth would have induced me to come ! ”

I suppose I went white, and I know I tottered back a little.

Then he stepped up close to me and put his hand on my arm, but there was nothing loverlike in his touch, nothing gentle or tender—nothing at all that reminded me of the man who had driven me home in the taxi through the rain-wet night and held my hand in his. He held me now in a hard, rough clutch, and as I looked into his eyes I saw that they were hard and bright also.

“I’ve come here to-day to ask you to promise me something ! I want you to give me your word of honour that never—are you listening to me ?—under any circumstances, whatever happens, will you let any one know where you were last night between nine and ten.”

I stared at him dumbfounded.

He shook my arm as if to rouse me.

“Do you hear ? ” he repeated stridently.

I tried to speak.

“Yes, I hear ! ” I managed to ejaculate.

“Then will you promise ? ”

“But why ? ”

“Because I want you to.”

“Do you mean you’re ashamed to let any one know I was there ? ”

“Hush! Don’t speak like that. There’s only one thing that matters at this moment, and that is that you give me your word of honour that whatever happens—no matter how you may be tempted to speak, you’ll never mention to any one that you were with me in Albany Chambers last evening.”

“What do you think might happen?”

“That’s neither here nor there. I want your promise! Will you give it to me?” He drew me close to him, and stared into my eyes. His face was very white. And how drawn it was! How careworn! My heart turned to lead at the sight, and a prescience of coming evil swept over me. “Can’t you trust me enough to promise without asking me to go into the whys and the wherefores? Listen, Teresa! I’m serious. I mean what I say. I’ve come here to-day wholly and solely to get that promise from you.”

“And if I don’t give it to you?”

“You wouldn’t be so cruel as to refuse!”

“You’re very mysterious—horribly mysterious! Can’t I at least know why?”

“No!”

Looking at him suddenly I discovered in the depths of his eyes an expression of dumb anguish that hurt me somehow more than anything I had ever seen.

“Oh, I promise!” I cried recklessly, yielding utterly to my emotion and forgetting everything but that he was suffering in some mysterious cause that I was quite unable to understand.

His face lit up.

But even yet he was not quite satisfied.

“You really mean that?”

“My promise is my promise.”

He searched my face a moment.

“Would nothing induce you to break it?”



“ Nothing ! ”

“ Good ! Now I must go ! ”

“ For how long am I to keep it ? ”

Anything to detain him a second longer !

“ For ever ! ”

He took my hands with a sudden impulsive, unguarded movement, pressing them to his face.

Something I know he whispered under his breath, but I could not catch what it was, though I would have given anything if I could have heard.

Then, without another word, another look, he was gone, and our great hall-door had slammed behind him.

I scarcely slept a wink that night. Tossing sleeplessly on my little white bed, crumpling the sheets, throwing off one blanket after another feverishly, and then pulling them on again and wondering if the morning would never come, I found that scene in the drawing-room becoming more and more amazing, more and more painful, more and more inexplicable.

It hurt me to remember myself waiting there for him in the dusk, longing for him to come, and then his coming and looking at me with those strange, hard eyes.

I had imagined everything would have been so different !

Yes, I had dreamed that he would put his arms round me, and I had even gone to the length of wondering what I should do if he kissed me.

I fell asleep at last I suppose, for when I awoke the sun was shining into my room, and Jane was admonishing me severely to get up at once or I'd be late for breakfast.

“ Your sleep's not doing you no good either, Miss Teresa,” Jane added. “ You're moaning and groaning to yourself. I do hope you haven't got worms ! ”

“ Oh, go away, Jane ! Don't bother me ! ”

"Well, be quick, then. I never saw such a household since the master and mistress went away. Can't get anybody up to breakfast at a decent hour! I've knocked six times at Miss Peggy's door, which she's locked, and there, I suppose, she's going to lie till it pleases her ladyship to want something to eat!"

Jane went off grumbling, and I proceeded to dress.

I quickened my movements presently when a sudden thought occurred to me that perhaps there would be a letter for me downstairs. In the night he might have changed his mind and written to me to tell me everything.

But I was doomed to disappointment.

There was only one letter for me, and that was from Hilary, telling me to send down a pair of pale pink stockings, her turquoise earrings, and six pairs of gloves, which I was to call for at the cleaners'.

"Hilary always wants *something*!" I said crossly, tossing the letter indignantly aside.

Aunt Anna was presiding over the tea-tray. Ermyntrude and Alice were eating porridge and squabbling over the relative merits of their hockey captains. Geoffrey was naughtily dipping his toast-and-butter in his tea and chaffing Aunt Anna about the over-night Suffrage riots and the broken windows in the Strand, for which Aunt Anna, be it said, was full of intensest disapproval and dismay. Curly-headed Dick had his nose buried in the "Daily Telegraph," and as I came in he looked up with a queer twisted grin.

"I say, Teresa!" he exclaimed excitedly, "this is a nice thing that's happened to that bloke of yours!"

"Bloke! How dare you, you vulgar, horrid little boy!"

"That chap Hall, I mean."

I went suddenly cold.

“What’s happened to him ? ” I cried, sinking into a chair as my limbs suddenly threatened to give way beneath me.

“ Been arrested ! For theft ! ”

“ Theft ! ”

“ Yes. The robbery occurred on the night before last between nine and ten—a safe broken open at his office, gold gone—they arrested him last night about half-past seven. My word ! Nice sort of fellow to have had here to dinner ! ”

“ It’s a lie ! ”

I reached out and grabbed the paper, seizing it so violently that it was torn in two ; then like a mad thing I rushed from the room, upstairs, down the corridor, to my own room at last, where alone, out of sight of mocking, curious eyes, I read for myself that terrible paragraph.

## CHAPTER XXVII

“ A YOUNG MAN, I PRESUME ? ”

“ DRIVE me as quickly as you can to New Square, Lincoln’s Inn Fields ! Do you hear ? Do you understand ? As quick as you can ! The quicker you are, the more I’ll pay you ! ”

I almost fell into the taxi and closed the door behind me.

“ Beg pardon, Miss, but you ’aven’t given me the number.”

“ I don’t know the number. I’ve forgotten ! But it’s the big white house at the corner on the right. Messrs. Grace & Grace, the lawyers, is on the door.”

“ Very good, Miss.”

Breathless and trembling I sank back in a corner of the conveyance, and closing my eyes I made desperate efforts to quieten the fever in my breast. I felt as if some one had given me an appalling, almost paralysing, blow. I was nearly stunned. But in spite of that, in spite of my upset condition, I had managed to decide on something to do ; so here I was rushing off post-haste to my father’s lawyers.

Crumpled in my hand was the newspaper.

But I had no need to look at it, for every word was branded on my brain.

At the lawyer’s I gave the man half a sovereign and dashed up the steps without waiting for change.

“ Is Mr. Robert Grace in ? ” I gasped out to the boy at the inquiry hole.

“ Yes, Miss.”

“ Please send in my name at once. It’s very urgent ! I can’t wait ! ”

Luckily for me and the state of tension I was in Mr. Robert was disengaged, and I was shown immediately into his room.

“ Why, Miss Teresa, this is an unexpected pleasure ! ”

“ Oh, I’m in such trouble, Mr. Grace ! ”

“ I’m sorry to hear that ! Won’t you sit down ? Sit near the fire. It’s very cold. Hadn’t you better remove your furs ? ”

“ Oh, I’m in such awful trouble ! . . . You must wonder why on earth I’ve come here. . . . Nobody knows anything about it. . . . Nobody must know. . . . You understand, Mr. Grace ? Just between you and me.”

“ Now just sit there quietly and get calm for a minute or two.”

Such a cool, matter-of-fact legal voice it was that it seemed to act on my nerves like a douche of cold water, suddenly bracing me up and bringing me back to my normal self, and his pale, ascetic, judicial countenance, clean-shaven and shrewd, looked down at me with a calm, kindly, leisurely gaze that further added to my process of cooling down.

“ I’ve known you all my life,” I continued presently, trying to speak coherently. “ Why, Mr. Grace, you’re almost the first man I can remember, . . . so after all surely it’s only natural that I should come to you . . . . My mother and father are both away, as you know. . . . I had to come to some one.”

“ Then I’m glad you came to me. Now what is it ? ”

“ Some one I know is in great trouble, and I want you to advise me how to act.”

“ Is the some one a man or a woman ? ”

“ A man ! ”

“ A young man, I presume ? ”

“ Yes, a young man.”

“ What is his trouble ? ”

“ He’s—he’s been arrested.”

“ Arrested ! My dear Miss Teresa ! Arrested what for ? ”

“ For theft. He didn’t do it ! ”

“ I see.”

Quietly he looked at me, and just as quietly my eyes returned his gaze.

“ What do you want me to do ? ”

“ I want you to tell me how I can see him.”

“ My dear Miss Teresa ! ”

His long, pale face grew inordinately grave.

I raised my voice a little, leaning forward and staring into his face.

“ I must see him, Mr. Grace. It’s no use your saying I can’t or shan’t or mustn’t ! For I shall, I will, I must ! That’s why I’ve come to you. Oh, Mr. Grace, you’re such an old, old friend of ours. . . . Oh, do help me ! Do be nice to me ! If I don’t see him I’ll go mad—really I will. But there, I’ve got to see him, and I’m *going* to see him ! ”

“ Now my dear young lady, calm yourself ! Let me hear all the details. Where’s the young man now ? ”

“ I—I don’t know ! ”

I was afraid to utter that awful word “ prison.”

“ When was he arrested ? ”

“ Last night.”

“ I see ! ”

I could see by his face that “ Prison ” was in his mind also.

“ Now my dear young lady, you must be quite frank with me ! First of all you must tell me the young man’s name. It’s no use trying to keep that from me, my child. If I’m to be of the slightest use to you I must know everything.”

“ Before I tell you his name, Mr. Grace, I want you to explain to me what will be happening to him.” Clasp ing my hands I looked up imploringly into his eyes. “ What will they be doing to him ? ” I whispered agonisingly. “ I mean now, at this very moment ? I am so stupid about law, I know nothing—absolutely nothing ! I haven’t the slightest idea what they do to a man when they arrest him. I only know that they lock him up somewhere.”

“ Our Mr. Robert,” as they called him at the office, took out his watch, examined it thoughtfully, then looked at me quietly.

“ If he was arrested last night, he will probably now be before the Magistrate.”

“ Well, I want you to take me there ! ”

“ I’m very sorry, Miss Teresa, but it’s quite out of the question.” He put his hand on my shoulder with a soothing paternal gesture. “ Young ladies don’t go to the Police Court. Why, my dear child, your father would never forgive me if I allowed such a thing as that to happen ! ”

“ I don’t care who forgives who or what ! ” I cried incoherently. “ And my father’s away ! He need never know, unless you tell him. Surely, Mr. Grace, you wouldn’t be so mean as to do that ! Considering that you’ve known me since I was a baby ! Oh, do take me there, Mr. Grace—do take me there ! ”

“ My dear child, it’s absolutely out of the question.

And even if I did it would do you no good. You would not be allowed to speak to him. The only thing I can suggest is that you tell me what you want to do and let me do it for you ! ”

“ Well, first of all—before anything else—I want to speak to him.”

“ Well, you may be able to do that afterwards. Listen to me ! I can’t bear to see you crying and sobbing there like that, you poor dear naughty little girl. You’ve evidently lost your heart to some worthless, good-looking scamp. If you tell me his name and give me particulars, I’ll go off myself to the Police Court and find out exactly what’s happened, and I’ll report to you.”

“ Then I shall stay here till you return ! ”

“ Very well, then ! Wilful young ladies will have their way. Sit here quietly in this big chair, and shut your eyes, and I’ll be back as soon as I can. It’s lucky for you, my dear child, that I’ve a comparatively empty morning. Now give me his name and tell me all about it ! ”

For answer I handed him the newspaper and pointed to a paragraph.

Slowly, in calm, dispassionate tones, he read it aloud, and, oh, how the words pierced me ! How they cut and flayed me ! How I winced under the torture of them—I who had it in my power to prove that they were lies !

“ The firm of Tindall & Tindall, the well-known shipowners, suffered an unpleasant experience the night before last. It seems that the firm had drawn a thousand pounds in gold from the bank, which was deposited in the safe in Leadenhall Street. The money was wanted for a vessel due to sail next day. The



Captain was to call for it at half-past eight next morning before the banks opened. The money was intact at nine o'clock at night, but at half-past ten the caretaker of the offices, going his nightly round, found that a clever robbery had been effected. A clerk named Patrick Hall, who stayed late in the building that evening, has been arrested. When questioned as to his movements that particular evening, Hall became confused, and made two contradictory statements.

“Hall is a young man of great promise, who had been very highly thought of by the firm.”

Silently the old lawyer put on his hat and coat, and silently he went away, and I sat there by the fire alone.

The next thing I knew was that Mr. Grace was back, and one glance at his face showed me that the situation had certainly not decreased in gravity.

I sprang to my feet.

“They’ve remanded him for a week. Bail was not forthcoming.”

My dry tongue clung to my dry lips.

“What do you mean by ‘bail was not forthcoming’? What is bail? Why was it not forthcoming?”

Gently he took my hands in his.

“The Magistrate wanted some one to go surety for £200, and no one came forward to do it.”

“But why didn’t *you* do it?” I cried fiercely, as his meaning dawned on my foolish brain.

“Come, be reasonable, Miss Teresa! I can’t go bail for a man I know nothing whatever about! £200 is £200!”

“You could have put it down on my father’s account!” I told him passionately. “You stick at £200 to save a man’s life!”

In bitter anger I suddenly took hold of my furs, slung them round my neck, and hurried out of the office. Somehow or other I should have to get that £200 myself.

Two hundred pounds !

Two hundred pounds !

How was I to get it ?

Who would give me £200 ? Who would lend it to me even, without wishing to know why I wanted it—and when they knew they'd be bound to refuse me. Oh, cruel, cruel world, I said to myself wildly. I never realised before how cruel and unjust you could be !

Then a sudden inspiration came to me, and I frantically hailed a passing taxi-cab and set off homewards. I had remembered those horrid old jewels that Grandmama had left me ! They were not fit to be seen. But perhaps they would *fetch* something !

A thick gold bracelet studded with six winking diamonds ; a string of fine seed pearls ; a heavy gold locket with one vast winking diamond in the middle ; two unset pearls, intended for earrings ; a brooch with a big emerald surrounded by pearls ; some old enamel buttons. I got them out and strewed them on my bed, which Sarah had just finished making.

She watched me suspiciously, or I fancied it, and I had to wait till she had left the room before I slipped them all into my velvet hand-bag.

The next thing I did was to drive to our jeweller's—a firm with whom my mother and father had been dealing for many years, and where Papa always bought us our Christmas presents, such as bits of silver for our dressing-tables, watches, trinkets, as well as jewels for Mama.

“ If you please, will you tell me exactly what all these things are worth ? ” I said breathlessly, going

up to the far end of the shop out of sight of other people, and addressing myself to the manager, who knew me well. Then I added impetuously, “Are they worth £200? For I want to raise that sum on them.”

The manager’s face changed, and I began to realise that selling things was a very different matter from buying them.

“I’m afraid that’s quite out of our line of business.”

“Wouldn’t you do it to oblige me?”

“I’m very sorry, Madam, but it’s quite against our rules. We never lend money on anything, and we do not buy.”

Angry and crestfallen I crept out and across the road.

But instead of being daunted I was all the more determined.

Fifteen minutes later—I hurry over this, for the thought of it still brings the hot scarlet to my cheeks—I was emerging from a shop over which three great gold balls hung flaringly, and in my little black bag there were no longer Grandmama’s diamonds, pearls, and emeralds, but four fifty-pound notes!

Then back to Lincoln’s Inn Fields and Mr. Grace.

I rushed straight into his office unannounced, and, seizing his arm, I showed him the notes, laughing hysterically as I did so.

“If you don’t take these notes, Mr. Grace, and get Patrick Hall let out on bail immediately, I’ll—I’ll——”

My voice broke and faded right away.

“Poor little girl!” said deep moved tones that I scarcely recognised as the lawyer’s cool, well-regulated ones—“poor little girl! I’m afraid you’re up against an impossible proposition. Also, I’m afraid your father will be extremely angry with me for helping you in any way. But there! I was young

once ! Dried-up old fossil as I seem to you—I was once a youth in strong fresh young manhood, and since you left me so abruptly, I’ve been thinking things over, and somehow that young man’s face has taken hold of me. I can’t tell why exactly, unless it is that it reminds me of myself when I was twenty-four, and a girl with fair hair like yours loved me. . . . Ah, the years and years since they laid my wife in her grave ! . . .”

He coughed, and turned away for a moment, blowing his nose hard, then locked up the notes in his desk.

Then in a matter-of-fact voice he said,

“ Now I shall go and get this business done with. And when the young man’s out, what next ? ”

“ Then you must bring him to me, Mr. Grace ! ”

“ Bring him to your house ? Impossible, my dear ! ”

“ Well, can I meet him here at your office ? ”

“ Yes, that would be the best thing. That’s the safest. I’ll bring him straight back here with me, and you can have your interview. It’s very, very weak of me, I’m sure. But—well, I’ll do it. Now I’m going to send one of my clerks out to order some lunch for you, and you can sit here in my office and have it at your ease. It will be quite an hour before I can get back ! ”

“ Oh, God bless you ! ” I cried impulsively, and seizing his hand I imprinted a very wet and slobbery kiss upon it, though he didn’t seem to notice. “ Never let him know about the bail ! ” I whispered brokenly, and he nodded in perfect understanding.

Two whole hours passed before the door opened and Mr. Grace walked in. Then, as in a dream, I heard the heavy door close behind him, and, as in a dream, I lifted my head, looked up, and saw that face—the face that represented “ my share of the world.”

“Tell me—have you kept your word?” he began at once.

“Yes. But I’m going to break it now.”

“No. You mustn’t do that! There’ll be no need for you to do that. I’ll get clear of the thing without.”

“I shall tell every one that from nine till half-past ten you were with me that evening!”

“You promised me, and you won’t break your word!”

“Then you must let me off my promise.”

“Not for anything on earth. I’d rather die than have your name dragged into this. The thought of it makes me crazy!”

He stood and stared down at me.

Now up till that moment I seemed to have been acting like a girl under a hypnotic spell; the world around me had disappeared; all I had seen was a long path, hedged in on both sides, and at the end of it this man; and, whatever happened, I had to get to him. No thorns, no brambles could keep me back, neither heat nor cold could deter me, nor yet the weight of all the world against me. I had been supremely mad and supremely strong—mad with the madness and strong with the strength of a mind and body given over utterly to one idea. Now, all was changed.

“I must go!” I muttered suddenly.

My gloves were in my hands, and I began to pull them on quickly.

“Are you going home?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Good! I’m glad of that.”

I split the thumb, and pulled off a button and a piece of kid.

“Good-bye!” I said.

The wave that had dashed me towards him was

receding, and in its backward flight it left me cold and shivering and ashamed.

“Good-bye!” I said again, and held out my hand. He took it and held it for a minute in both of his, but his touch was utterly emotionless.

“Give me your promise again before you go,” he said. “If you do that, it will make me ever so much happier.”

“Of course I give it you!” I answered.

Anything to get away!

“Nothing will make you break it?”

“No!”

Then I turned and hurried out of the room, rushed past Mr. Grace without a word, and hailing the first taxi I could find I flew homewards as if for dear life’s sake.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BOBBIE'S PARTY

"GIRLS!" cried Peggy, bursting like a whirlwind into the dining-room, where Hilary, Alice, Ermyntrode, and I were finishing our lunch. "Girls, Bobbie is going to take us all to the new Opera House to-night! Think of that! He's commandeered a box, and has invited three whole young men as well as himself. Now don't say any more that sister Peggy isn't a brick, for of course if there'd have been no Peggy there'd have been no Bobbie, mark you well! And if there'd been no Bobbie there'd have been no box at the opera! Oh, and you're to come too, Aunt Anna, dear, of course. Don't you think it will be lovely? But there! I quite forgot to tell you the best of it all! What a darling Bobbie is, to be sure! He's dining us all at the Carlton first—the whole crowd of us—so we must put on our best bibs and tuckers and make ourselves look awfully nice."

Peggy sank breathless in a chair, declining lunch, as she had already lunched at the Creays' house in Grosvenor Square, and entered animatedly into a discussion of what we should all wear.

Aunt Anna woke up and became quite excited, for though she was an Aunt who took life tremendously seriously, she also had a nice, giddy side to her character, which delighted in dinners and theatre-parties, and her eyes sparkled as we told her how nice she would

look in that grey soft satin of hers with a long coat of grey Brussels lace.

"But you, Teresa," cried my young sister Alice with a sharp unexpectedness peculiar to young sisters, "*you* don't look very delighted about to-night. I never saw such a glum face."

I started, and tried to brighten up.

"Oh, I'm all right," I said. "Don't take any notice of me. I shall enjoy myself as much as anybody when the time comes."

"Why, of course you will!" said Peggy peremptorily, with that little new masterful air that had come over her since her engagement to Robert, fifth Earl of Creay. "You'll have the time of your life, Teresa, my child, for Bobbie has invited Oscar Courtney, the stunningest, handsomest, richest, nicest young man in all the world expressly for you!"

"I hate the name Oscar," I answered chillingly. "Besides, rich, handsome, stunning young men are always *horrors*. They're spoilt up to the nines. For my part I can't stand them."

"Oh, wait till you see him," said Peggy calmly. "I expect you'll have a very different story to tell to-morrow morning!"

"Not I!" I said loftily, and rising from the table I went away and left them there to their merry and comfortable chatter. My heart was too heavy to endure very much of it just then.

And yet mixed with the oppression there was a strange dazzling sense of light, gleaming and sparkling all the time in the inner recesses of my heart, and I seemed to hear sweet music played softly, as of many muted violins making melodies together in golden, fragrant air, penetrated with the poignant odours of the sweetest flowers in the world—heliotrope, white



orange-blossom, red roses, golden jasmine, and laurel, "that flower that smells of honey and the sea," all mingling their perfumes together ineffably until the world about me was like some beautiful sunlit garden in the far, far south.

In the library I sank into Papa's big, padded leather chair, and, closing my eyes, surrendered myself to my dreams.

Very strange and inexplicable it was to me, this new phase that had so suddenly come sweeping over my life; very strange and very revolutionising; for I knew that never again could I be the same old, silly, careless, happy-go-lucky Teresa, who hoarded dead-and-gone heroes in her heart, and had never a thought for a living, breathing young man.

Now Love had come to me—come with all its white and gleaming magic, and I had a hero of my own at last!

As I sat there, huddled up in Papa's big red leather chair with my feet on the gleaming copper fender, and the crowded book-shelves looking down on me with all their hidden tomes of wisdom and experience, I was telling myself passionately that if anything happened to Patrick Hall it would kill me—I should never get over it; for already, even in so short a space of time, I seemed to have parted with my own identity and merged myself miraculously with that of the man I loved.

The dark cloud hanging over us began gradually to assume a silver lining.

I said to myself with the sublime and beautiful confidence of girlhood that he was innocent, and so nothing could really happen to him.

But all the same, I wished with a deep, unutterable yearning that kept bringing the tears like a mist before my eyes as I gazed into the depths of the library fire,

that the mystery would be cleared up promptly, and the dark suspicion hanging over him would be replaced by a halo.

What maddened me was my utter inability to do anything, for my promise bound me hand and foot.

However, I had promised. That was an end to it; I had implored him to let me off, but he had refused; and I knew that there was an iron will behind those blue, sharp eyes of his, and that he would hold me to my promise to the end.

"But he will get out of it all right," I told myself firmly. "He is innocent, and when a man is innocent the truth is bound to come out, sooner or later."

Again that hypnotism had hold of me.

I sprang up, and going over to my father's desk I sat down and dashed off a letter—the first love-letter I had ever written. My cheeks burnt as the words came flying from my eager pen. It frightened me horribly to see written down in black and white in my own handwriting such sentences as "I love you. . . . I love you above and beyond any one on earth. . . . Is it really true that you love me too? . . . Oh, let our love and trust abide and wax stronger and stronger, proving itself all the truer and more lasting by reason of this trial. . . . Never forget that I care for you so much that I would die for you, if I had the chance. . . . My darling, my Love! . . . Please write to me and tell me when I can see you."

That was what I wrote at the great mahogany desk in the Martindale library, that drear grey day in March with the skies like lead outside the windows and the trees of the square still shivering like black skeletons, awaiting the tender touch of spring to come and resurrect them to new-born life again, while within Papa's stern, learned, row-upon-row of volumes frowned

down on me in dumb astonishment as I signed myself  
“Your own Teresa.”

After that I felt better.

In fact, I felt so much better that I was able to put that letter in the fire and write another one—a quiet, dignified little epistle, which I slipped out presently and posted.

I went back into the house then, and busied myself with some sewing, joining my sisters in the drawing-room and doing my best not to be a kill-joy.

Soon after tea we all went upstairs and began our preparations for the evening, for we were to dine at seven, as the opera began at half-past eight, and being the “Tales of Hoffmann” none of us wished to miss a bar of that haunting music, for let people say what they will, dear old disparaged Offenbach knows the secret that touches the heart-strings of his listeners, making them gay, or sad, or sentimental by turns.

It was the first time any of us girls had been to Mr. Hammerstein's new Opera House, and as we took our places in the box exclamations of delight fell from our lips, so gorgeous was the spectacle around us. The vast building had a dazzling, fairy-like appearance, all white and gold, with its boxes done in tones of faint shell pink that made just the necessary relief of colour without being heavy or obtrusive. Being a new house everything had a wonderful freshness and lack of dinginess that was very grateful after some of our other dreary-looking places. And as for the audience, the place was packed from floor to ceiling, only the people present had a more interested look than is usually to be found at operas, as though they had come here really to listen to the music instead of to show themselves off and see their friends and acquaintances do the same.

We were all delighted with the new soprano—the tiny, dainty, little lady from America, who made such swift havoc of the hearts of music-loving London.

“What a charming doll she makes!” I exclaimed to the tall, irreproachable young dandy on my left, who had instantly constituted himself my cavalier.

“Awfully rippin’!” he replied.

He twirled an imaginary moustache and looked at me with a vacant glance, which he fondly believed was full of unutterable meaning.

I shrugged my shoulders, rather scornfully, I’m afraid, and turned away.

Presently he put his hand on my arm.

“I say, Miss Martindale, there’s some one up there in the last row of the grand circle nodding awfully hard at you, don’t you know? Do you see? . . . sittin’ next to an old boy in a grey morning suit, don’t you see?”

I looked and saw the people Oscar Courtney was indicating were Admiral Binning and Jean!

I nodded frantically, and Jean nodded back, a look of relief flitting over her face as she saw that I had discovered her.

To my surprise I saw that the Admiral was not in evening dress, and neither was she, which was strange in so very dainty and punctilious a person as Jean Binning.

A few minutes later the door of our box opened softly, and Jean came in. The act had just ended then. The lights went up almost immediately, and everybody began to chatter animatedly—everybody except Jean.

“I hope you won’t mind my coming in among you all in this get-up,” she exclaimed hastily, looking down at her neat dark-blue serge coat and skirt, “but I—I particularly wanted to—to speak to Teresa.”

The moment she said that a peculiar cold feeling ran over me, as though an icy hand had touched me on the forehead.

I made room for her at my side.

But Oscar Courtney immediately drew a chair close up to us, and bending over me offered us chocolates from a huge gilded box, tied up resplendently with yellow ribbons.

"Rippin' opera, isn't it?" he said to Jean, when I had introduced them.

"Is it? I suppose so. I—I wasn't listening much."

She fixed her eyes on mine, and I saw in their depths an imploring look.

"I want to speak to you alone for a minute," she managed to exclaim in an undertone.

But it was easier said than done, for Oscar Courtney seemed absolutely determined not to leave my side. There he sat, alternately twirling an imaginary moustache, exclaiming "rippin'!" and offering us chocolates, till we both turned sulky from sheer exasperation and scarcely vouchsafed him a word.

Then the curtain went up on the second act, and the beautiful Lina Cavalieri took the house by storm with her dark, sinuous beauty, while the music of the pretty Barcarole drifted soothingly over the vast audience.

Jean made a movement as if to go, but I clutched her arm and whispered, "Wait! Perhaps there'll be a chance after this act!"

But in the next interval it was worse than ever, for the Admiral came round then to see what had happened to Jean.

"We'll have to go soon, my girl," he said apologetically. "Last train's eleven, you know. You'll have to make a bolt for it presently."

“I’m not going,” said Jean suddenly. “I’m going to stay in town all night. I’m going home with Teresa.”

“Do !” I cried excitedly.

I was pleased that she was coming, and yet all the time with my pleasure was mingled that strange, cold, disquieting sensation, as though the ice-cold hand was still lingering on my forehead.

I could scarcely wait till the end of the opera, and I must confess that I saw very little of the last act, for something told me that the mysterious thing that Jean had to say to me was connected with the man I had called “My Darling ! My Love !” only a few hours before.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### UP IN TERESA'S BEDROOM

"TERESA, you'll have to lend me a nightgown."

"Of course I will! Cambric or flannelette?"

"Anything! Flannelette. One always feels cold if one sleeps in a strange room."

"But you shall have my hot-water bottle."

"It's awfully good of you, Teresa. I hate to be putting you out."

We were up in my bedroom at last, Jean and I, but even yet we were not alone, for Hilary was hanging about, waiting slyly, I opined, for a stray word or two about Arthur, while she made the excuse that she couldn't trust any one but me to unfasten the little hooks in her chiffon frock.

"Well, there! It's unfastened now," I said pointedly. "And Jean's dropping with sleep. Do go off to bed, Hilary! It's half-past twelve."

"Oh, I know what that means," exclaimed Hilary crossly. "You and Jean want to get rid of me while you talk. I know you, Teresa; you always try to get Jean to yourself, and Jean's just as much my friend as she is yours, don't forget that—aren't you, Jean?"

"Oh, don't be a silly," said Jean, crossly too. "I'm nobody's friend at all. I'm much too tired to like anybody just now."

Hilary flaunted away at last in high dudgeon, ex-

claiming that I was a "selfish little cat." I knew quite well that she had just as much to say to Jean as I had.

"It'll keep till the morning," I told her consolingly.

Then, yielding to sudden impulse, I fled after her down the corridor and caught her at the door of her own room.

"Dear old Hil!" I threw my arm round her shoulder. "Don't think me a little beast for turning you out. But I'm awfully bothered about something, and that's the truth of it!"

"Poor old Teresa!" Her anger vanished in an instant, and she flung her arms about me and pressed her fresh young lips to my cheek.

I believe in her heart she was a little surprised as well as touched by my coming after her, for how could she know that I was in love myself, and knew what it was to long to talk about the one you care for, as she, my pretty sister, was longing to talk about Arthur Binning?

Then I went back to Jean.

I closed the door and locked it, and Jean and I were face to face.

She had put on over her nightgown a loose pink woollen wrapper, that I had lent her, and pink quilted shoes covered her slender arched feet, and she was standing in front of the bedroom fire, her hands clenched tight, and a look in her face that haunted me for a long, long time afterwards.

"At last!" I said, going close to her.

"At last!" she repeated strangely.

"Well, what is it, Jean? Tell me—quick!"

"It's about Patrick Hall!"

"I knew it was!"

"Ah, you knew it was, did you? Well, I'm not



surprised at that, Teresa. In fact, I should have been very much surprised if you hadn't."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, considering what you, Teresa Martindale, have got on your conscience about Patrick Hall, I don't find it very strange that you should be expecting to hear something about him!"

Instantly some instinct warned me to be very careful what I said.

"Look here, Teresa, I know everything!"

"Do you?"

"How dare you keep silent? That's what I want to know. That's what I've been waiting to say to you. How dare you keep silent, when his character is at stake! And you—you alone—know something that would clear up the mystery!"

Her attack was so absolutely unexpected that a sharp cry of amazement was forced involuntarily from my lips.

"On the night when that theft was committed," she went on vehemently, her brown eyes glittering in her white face, while her black hair fell in soft dark clouds about her slender shoulders, "on that night Patrick Hall was either here at this house or you met him somewhere else."

I stared at her in speechless amazement.

"Now, what I want to know is—are you coming forward to tell the truth?"

Still I was silent, utterly overcome by this extraordinary and unlooked-for complication.

"You saw him that night!" repeated Jean.

"You've no right to say such a thing," I managed to stammer out.

"No right!"

She looked at me fiercely for a moment, and never

have I seen such scorn as burnt in those fine eyes of hers.

I just had sense enough to resist the question choking in my throat—the question that would instantly prove fatal if I uttered it—the dangerous, compromising question, “How do you know?”

But next moment enlightenment was forced upon me.

Jean, bringing her hand from behind her back with a sudden, swift movement, held up a letter and fluttered it before my eyes, then crushed it away hastily for safety inside the front of her pink wrapper.

“That’s a letter from you!” she told me quietly. “Yes, from you, yourself! You wrote it on the morning after that night when the theft was committed. And in that letter occur some words, written in your own handwriting, and signed ‘Teresa Martindale.’”

“What are the words?” I managed to gasp out. She quoted them to me.

“*By the way, I saw your friend Patrick Hall last night—had a quite long talk with him, in fact.*”

She waited to see what I had to say to that.

I said nothing—nothing at all. For had I not promised, and did not my word of honour bind me to a strict unyielding silence?

“So that’s how I know that he was either here or you met him somewhere else that evening, for as I said before you wrote me that letter on the morning after. You saw him. I have it in your own writing. Now what I want to know is, are you coming forward to tell the truth?”

I turned away, and walking to the washstand poured myself out a glass of cold water and gulped it down.

Jean followed me.

“That’s not all, Teresa,” she said. “There’s more.

I went myself to see Patrick Hall. Yes, I got Dad to come with me, and we went and called on him at his rooms just to let him see that we are not the sort of people to go back on a man in trouble. And what do you think I saw in his rooms? What do you think I saw lying there over by his book-shelves? Ah, Teresa, when I saw it I tell you I felt for a minute as if I were going to faint. It was the hatpin I myself gave to you last Christmas—that silver hatpin with the lump of turquoise set in. So I knew then that you had been there. And *that's* not all"—her voice rising as she spoke. "Mr. Hall had evidently never noticed the hatpin before, for it was almost hidden by the edge of the shelves, but all of a sudden he seemed to divine that I was looking strangely at something, and then he discovered what it was. On purpose I turned away for a minute. And when I turned round the hatpin was gone! So I knew by that he was going to pretend about it also—for your sake again, of course!"

Instead of answering, I got into bed.

"Good-night!" I said. "I'm going to sleep."

I refused to speak after that.

## CHAPTER XXX

“LITTLE ONE ! ”

EARLY next morning, while Jean was still asleep in the spare bed across my room, I got up and began noiselessly to dress, in spite of the fact that I had had only a brief and feverish slumber, full of uneasy dreams, in which Patrick Hall and Jean and myself kept meeting in the most worrying and complicated way just when we none of us wanted to see each other.

I was glad to be awake, for a sense of great haste was now pressing down upon me.

I took an ice-cold bath and felt fresher. Then I put on a dark-blue serge coat and skirt, and hurried down to the library, closing the door of my bedroom gently behind me so that Jean should go on sleeping.

I was not angry with Jean, strange to say.

Instead, my heart was full of an extreme pity for her, for I was now perfectly certain that she had lost her heart to Patrick, and that made me feel dreadfully sorry for her.

Seating myself at my father's desk, I dashed off a note.

“I want to see you at once about something very important, so will you arrange a meeting ? Wherever you say I will meet you.

“TERESA.”

Then I went out and posted the letter myself in the red pillar-box at the corner of the Square.

A clock was striking eight just then, so I knew the post would soon be delivered.

I went into the dining-room, where Aunt Anna was the only one down. She was pleased to see me, but exclaimed at my pallor.

“ Come and have a nice cup of tea, dear, and some bacon-and-egg, and you’ll feel better. The others seem to be all asleep still.”

Never had a cup of tea such appealing qualities. In spite of myself I felt a comforting sensation creep over me as I stirred the hot, fragrant beverage in a nice large cup of old-fashioned white-and-gold china, while Aunt Anna’s dear, kind face behind the tray seemed to soothe me in the midst of my agitation, with its air of calm, unruffled sweetness and its suggestion of having left all worrying, troublesome worldly interests behind her long ago. She had white hair, but young lips singularly free from bitterness ; and as I looked at her I wondered if she had ever been in love, and what had happened, and why they had never married, and I wondered too, with the desperate intolerance of youth, how she had been able to live through the lone, long years without him.

I got up suddenly, and going round to her I put my arms round her neck and kissed her cheek.

“ You’re such a darling, Aunt Anna,” I said. “ I simply can’t tell you how I love you.”

She looked surprised and pleased.

“ Dear Teresa,” she murmured gently, patting my hand. Then naïvely she added, with a peculiar childishness that characterised her nature, “ Did you girls think I made a nice chaperon last night ? Were Peggy and Bobbie pleased with me, I wonder ? ”

“ I should think they were ! ” I answered heartily. “ You were just a *duck* ! We all said so—every one of us. And you looked sweet, too ! When my hair goes grey, I shall wear nothing but grey satin. It’s awfully becoming ! ”

Giving her another kiss I went back to my place, my heart feeling warmer for that little scene.

It was the same impulse that made me run after Hilary last night—the flowing of a soft and gentle current through my veins that seemed to be urging me impetuously to hold out my arms to every one, old or young, rich or poor, friends or enemies ; for the love that was growing in my heart seemed like something much broader and deeper than just the love of one man ; instead, it was like a wonderful and exquisite birth of tenderness and pity for every one in the world.

The post came in just then, and to my wild joy there was a letter for me.

I slipped it into my coat pocket.

Alice, Dick, and Geoffrey were making their appearance then, all exclaiming loudly at the surprising sight of me being down to breakfast so early.

Once I would have answered them back sharply, but to-day I only laughed, and asking Aunt Anna to excuse me, left the room, and went back to the library, which I knew would be quite deserted at this hour of the morning.

As I opened the letter, my heart was beating so fast that my hands trembled.

It would be the first love-letter he had ever written me !

What would he say ?

At any rate, he was not going to say very much, for here were no closely covered pages, such as every girl hopes to find when she gets a letter from the man she

cares about. There were just a very few lines, and how characteristic of the man they were !

“ LITTLE ONE,

“ I can’t thank you for your letter, but it means something to me beyond all words. *But don’t write any more.* Please be very careful about this. Don’t write any more, nor will I write to you nor see you. But don’t worry. I can’t bear the thought of that. Just trust me and believe that I’ll get out of the thing myself. The thought that you’ve given me your word of honour consoles me. I wonder if you can understand how much it means to me to keep your name out of it ?

“ P. H.”

Tears swam in my eyes, and I buried my burning face in my hands for a few moments.

Then I obeyed the scribbled injunction in the corner of his letter, and after reading it through once more put it reluctantly in the fire.

I told myself that in the meantime he would get my letter that was already posted, and he would answer it at once, and we should meet, and then I would tell him of Jean’s extraordinary discovery and her threat, and he would advise me what to do.

Was Jean asleep still ?

It suddenly occurred to me that I would run up and see if she would like a cup of tea.

But to my amazement, when I went into the bedroom, I found that Jean and all trace of her had disappeared. Her little blue felt hat was gone from my chest of drawers, and her seal coat was no longer hanging on the knob of my wardrobe door. I noted, with suddenly quickened perceptions, also that her brown

*suède* hand-bag had disappeared from the mantelpiece where I had seen it this morning.

“Where’s Miss Binning ?” I asked Sarah, who came in just then to make the beds.

“She’s gone.”

“Do you mean gone down to breakfast ?”

“No ; she’s gone right away. She wouldn’t have any breakfast, only just a cup of tea she asked me to bring her. She got up and dressed very quick, and she told me to tell you, Miss Teresa, that she couldn’t wait. She was in a hurry, and would you excuse her going off like that.”

“What a funny thing !” I murmured involuntarily.

Scarcely believing the maid’s words I went down stairs and looked for myself in the morning-room and then in the drawing-room, but what Sarah said was quite true.

Jean was gone.



## CHAPTER XXXI

“ WITHOUT A STAIN ON HIS CHARACTER ”

No answer came to my letter—none at all. Not a word of any kind reached me, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I refrained from writing again.

But suddenly everything changed.

The evening papers came in as I sat rather dismally by the fire in the drawing-room with Aunt Anna one wet, cold afternoon when the others were all making merry at a *matinée* and I was keeping Aunt Anna company, she being kept in the house with a nasty attack of migraine.

“ Here’s the ‘Evening News.’ I wonder what’s happened.”

Opening the paper I looked through it hurriedly, and then my heart seemed to stop beating and everything went black before my eyes.

“ Teresa, Teresa ! ”

I heard Aunt Anna’s voice speaking from far, far away.

“ It’s all right, Aunt Anna,” I managed to gasp out.

“ I thought you were going to faint. You lay back and went ghastly white and breathed so hard I was quite alarmed.”

“ Did I ? How strange ! Oh, no, I’m not going to faint ; I’m—I’m——” I suddenly burst into tears.

But they were tears of the wildest., most extraordinary happiness I had ever experienced in my life—

tears of joy, tears of unutterable relief—tears of gratitude to the great, kind, All-Seeing One, whose tender hand was smoothing out the tangle with such a swift and magic touch.

I got up and went over to Aunt Anna, and going down on my knees beside her, laid my face in her lap, while my whole heart went out in thanks for Patrick's deliverance.

Presently I jumped up, and read again that paragraph.

Was it true ?

Was the paper perhaps mistaken, or was I imagining those printed words there before my eyes ?

For what the newspaper was telling me was that Patrick was free ! The charge against him had been unreservedly withdrawn by Tindall & Tindall, as the money had been discovered safely stowed away in a recess in Mr. Walter Tindall's private bureau.

The charge was dismissed. Patrick left the Court without a stain on his character, said the Magistrate.

Up and down before me, up and down, danced those ringing golden words. . . . "Without a stain on his character. . . . Without a stain on his character. . . . Without a stain on his character !"

I was half crazy with delight.

And then a wild and exhilarating thought struck me, and I got up and began to move about the firelit drawing-room, positively unable to keep still. I picked withered leaves from the narcissi and hyacinths growing about the room in blue Wedgwood pots, I seized the cushions, smacked them all sharply into nice, soft, uncrumpled positions, stroking their gold and black and scarlet satin surfaces with happy trembling fingers that matched the glad quiver of my lips and the rainbow mists in my eyes, I put a big log of

wood on the fire, and then threw a handful of pine-cones on top till the blaze mirrored itself in the black, polished surface of the Bechstein Grand on the other side of the room. And all the while I was telling myself that the first thing, the very first thing, he would do would be to come straight here to me.

I looked at the clock.

Half-past five !

Any minute he might come.

But I must see him alone. Our meeting must take place with no third eyes upon us ; for in that divine moment of meeting nothing should keep me from his arms.

I glanced at Aunt Anna ponderingly, but I saw she was far too comfortable in a big armchair with her little velvet slippers resting so daintily on the copper fender ; I had not the heart to disturb her ; instead I took myself quietly out of the room and went across the hall to the library. There I turned up all the lights, and without ringing for the servants built up a glorious fire with my own hands. The rain was pattering angrily on the window-panes, but the sharp twang of its notes was to me the sweetest music, making tender accompaniment to the loud glad song in my heart.

For now he would come !

A moment, and the door would open and I should be in his arms.

I had given Simpson instructions to show him straight in here when he arrived.

A quarter to six struck and he had not come.

Then six. Still he had not come.

A quarter-past six—half-past six—a quarter to seven, and still he had not come.

When seven o'clock struck and the first-bell sounded through the house. I began to think that I

should not see him before dinner, but after dinner—directly after—he would be sure to come. So all the evening I sat alone in the library, isolated from the others, professedly struggling with a difficult canto of Dante, but really watching the door and listening for footsteps in the hall.

And still he did not come.

No letter and no telegram arrived either. At last I went to bed, my spirits damped a little from my disappointment, but all ready to fly again next day, for the morning's post would assuredly bring a letter from him, and almost immediately afterwards he would come himself. Of that I was ludicrously certain.

And yet when the morning came there was no letter from him, and the whole day passed by, hour after hour, until at last four o'clock was reached and still he had neither come nor written.

Then, and not till then, I saw my folly.

How utterly idiotic I had been! How blind! How almost cruelly neglectful!

For of course he had been waiting all this time for a word from me; and he would not dream of coming till he had received it.

I was half beside myself when that thought struck me.

I could scarcely write quickly enough, even with a lead pencil:

“Come at once. I'm waiting for you. I've been waiting for you ever since.

“YOUR TERESA.”

Ringling up a messenger-boy I waited impatiently till a small, important boy in dark-blue clothes and neat cap came strutting in, and receiving the letter and my

low, hurried but insistent admonitions and instructions, started off to take it to Patrick's rooms in Albany Chambers.

In half an hour he returned.

“The gentleman's gone. There's no one there. I knocked and rang for ten minutes, then I thought I'd better bring the letter back to you, Miss. Here it is.”

“Gone away!”

“Yes. After I'd rung for five minutes without stopping, the caretaker come up the steps and told me the gent had gone away this morning. She said sum-think about an address, about a Hadmiral at a place called Southwater, that he'd gone to stay with, but I thought I'd better bring the letter back.”

I gave him half-a-crown for himself.

“Thank you. You're a good boy. You can go,” I said dully.

So it was Jean's people he had gone to first.

Jean's people—and *Jean*.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### COLUMBINE !

THREE days went by. Days, were they ? They seemed to me like so many centuries. And then a letter came from him saying that he was staying at Southwater with the Binnings.

“ I know it’s stupid of me to take the thing like this,” he wrote. “ But the fact is, I can’t get over my disappointment about you. It’s simply hellish. I feel as if I can’t bear to see you yet.”

When I read the letter I laughed, then I crumpled it up and threw it in the fire, and I said to myself, “ I don’t know what he means by disappointment in me, but if that’s what he’s made of the sooner everything came to an end between us the better ! ”

I told myself then that he must have been in love with Jean all the time, not with me.

I had been a plaything, a toy, a pastime.

Perhaps even he had been working out a secret and deep-rooted plan of revenge on me for having cut him that day at the Docks. Anyway, be that as it may, it was quite obvious that what I had taken so seriously—so deadly seriously—was nothing but a passing little episode to him.

I rushed away from my thoughts, and went up to Peggy’s bedroom.

“ Peggy, Peggy ! ” I cried excitedly. “ Do you think it’s too late for me to change my mind and come

with you to the Fancy Dress Ball to-night ? Would the Creays mind ? Would it upset your party if I came in at the eleventh hour ? ”

“ Not a bit of it ! ” said Peggy. “ Bobbie was only saying to me at lunch to-day how glum Oscar Courtney was when he heard you couldn’t come.”

“ Nonsense ! What shall I wear, Peg ? Will you make me look awfully nice ? ”

“ Oh, that’s the way the land lies, is it ? ” smiled Peggy gleefully. “ Why, Teresa, you’re a coquette, and I didn’t know it.”

But what she didn’t know was that the Binnings were going to be there, and very likely *he* would go with them.

“ Perhaps. It’s never too late to mend. What shall I wear ? ” I asked excitedly.

“ What have you got ? ”

I pondered a moment.

“ Come over to my bedroom and see,” I said, slipping my arm through Peggy’s, and drawing her away with me. And perhaps never in my life till that moment had I realised how sweet a thing it was to have these, dear sisters, who, although they quarrelled with one at times and said sharp things, and told the truth over-candidly, were yet permeated with a soft and gentle essence of womanhood, which came floating around one soothingly when the world outside pricked and scorned one. There was comfort for me in the soft warmth of Peggy’s rounded arm as it pressed against mine, and the laughter on her lips and the *frou-frou* of her skirts and the faint odour of Cherry Blossom that she was so fond of all seemed to do a little towards lifting the weight off my heart.

We opened a trunk and dragged out various costumes.

"Here's a shepherdess," she said, holding up a little pale-pink satin garment.

"Too ordinary," I said.

"A nun."

"I want something more exciting."

"A Greek Slave."

"No. It reminds me of that breaking-up dance at school when I wore that dress for the first time. I feel too old for it now."

"Here's your old Juliet dress that you had for the theatricals last Christmas."

"Oh, I don't fancy myself as Juliet."

"Japanese!"

"Too hackneyed."

"Well, that's about all there is."

Hilary came in just then.

"How would you like to have my new Columbine dress?" she said generously. "It will just fit you."

"Columbine!" I clapped my hands. "That's just the thing! I'd love it! I feel like Columbine to-night!"

Hilary and Ermyntrode helped me to dress when it was time, while Alice hovered about, and Peggy flitted in and out, a little song on her lips all the time. How happy she was, our Peggy! And how intent she was on making other people happy too!

As we whirled away to the ball, she and I, she said, "I'm awfully glad you've come, Tess, dear. Somehow it's much more fun if you have one of your own sisters with you. Then if a hook comes undone, or your hair gets skewhiff, you always know who to turn to."

In the entrance, waiting for us, were the Creays and their party, among them a tall, dark, very spruce young man, who immediately attached himself to me.



"You're looking rippin' to-night!" he whispered, as we waltzed together to the haunting strains of the beautiful "Blue Danube," the waltz which neither time nor rivals have ever thrust from its place in the world's heart. Our steps suited perfectly. It was delightful to dance with him.

"You'll give me another dance, won't you?" he pleaded when that one was over.

"With pleasure," I said, smilingly.

I knew he was surprised, for I had never been so nice to him before.

"Give me two more!" he added eagerly. "And two extras!"

"You're greedy!" I laughed, but I made no demur.

"And whatever happens, you'll give me the last dance of all, won't you? At a ball it's the last dance that means more than anything else;" and he wrote his name at the end of my programme.

I inspected him coquettishly.

"What are you meant to be?" I asked.

"I'm a French student," he said.

"What are you studying, Monsieur?"

"A very pretty lady."

"Do you like my get-up?"

"It's the prettiest in the room."

"Oh, nonsense! I'm only a simple little Columbine—nobody of importance."

Many young men pressed round me, introduced continuously by old Lady Creay and the never-failing Bobbie, and soon my programme was full from top to bottom.

Had the Fancy Dress element got into my blood?

Somehow a reckless little Columbine dancing with a handsome French student seemed quite a different thing to Teresa Martindale dancing with Oscar Courtney.

Nobody who was present will ever forget that celebrated Arts Club Ball, when a spirit of gay frolic seemed to seize even the staidest, dourest souls, and a thrill of youthful mirth ran through every one, from the youngest debutante to the time-worn doorkeepers, making light hearts lighter and heavy hearts less heavy.

And mine, that was aching in my breast, seemed suddenly to stop beating as I saw the figure of Patrick Hall forcing a way towards me through the crowd.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

“ALAS. WE TWO—WE TWO ! ”

I MUST be calm, casual, natural.

Whatever happened, he must never know how deeply he had wounded me ; so when he reached my side, he found me smiling.

“ Oh, Mr. Hall ! How you startled me ! How do you do ? What a lovely ball, isn't it ? I never saw anything so gorgeous in my life. I'm a Columbine. What are you ? ”

Patrick Hall vouchsafed me no reply, only looked down at me intently under a pair of scowling brows.

“ I want to speak to you alone,” he said.

“ I'm afraid it will be difficult,” I answered, with a laugh.

My hand was in Oscar Courtney's arm all the time, and I made no effort to remove it.

“ I'm just going to supper,” I added brightly.

“ And after you've had supper ? ”

“ Oh, my programme's full from beginning to end ! ”

“ You'd better give me a few minutes then between two dances.”

“ The dances follow each other so quickly that there's really no time in between ! ”

Oscar Courtney was looking a little uncomfortable now, as though not quite sure of my wishes.

I turned and made a significant pressure on his arm.

“ Shall we go on ? ” I said.

But Patrick stopped me.

Only he, of all the men I had ever met, would have taken such a step as the one he now peremptorily adventured.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, addressing himself point-blank to Oscar, "but I wish very much to have some conversation alone with Miss Martindale. Would you mind leaving us together for a few minutes?"

Oscar went red.

Then he assumed the stony look peculiar to young well-bred Englishmen in the face of a difficulty.

"Certainly," he answered instantly.

"No, don't go!" I said to him immediately. "Stay with me!"

"Certainly!" he replied, just as naturally as before.

Old Lady Creay came waddling towards us just then, in all the splendid black lace and diamonds of a Spanish Grandee.

"Oh, Oscar, my dear," she exclaimed, "are you dancing? No? Would you be so good as to give me your arm then, and conduct me upstairs to the Fitzroyens' box? I've lost sight of everybody in this terrible crush, and I see old Lady Fitzroyen up there all alone—if I can only get to her."

A bow from Oscar and a smile and wave of the hand from Lady Creay, and she and Oscar disappeared, and Patrick and I stood face to face alone in the midst of that great whirling, gyrating mass, looking into each other's eyes.

"I want to have the thing out once and for all."

"There's nothing to have out."

Smilingly I flung back my retort.

"Please don't suppose I'm so silly as to place any significance on that—that passing little episode," I answered gaily.

“Passing little episode!”

He repeated my words incredulously, staring down into my face with eyes that were full of gathering fire.

“So that’s what it meant to you! A passing little episode!” he said, at last. “Well, it’s good to know the truth. And now just let me say straight out to you, Teresa, what I want to say. It’s this: I could never have credited you with breaking that promise. When I got your letter saying you had something important to tell me I went to my lawyer for the purpose of asking him to allow me to meet you there at his chambers, as that seemed the wisest place to meet. To my amazement he said to me, ‘The young lady has already been and told me that she knows where you were on the evening of the theft and she is quite willing to assist in establishing an alibi if necessary.’ I could scarcely believe him. It seemed incredible that you, whom I had implicitly trusted, had so little regard for my wishes and so little sense of the sacredness of your word of honour as to act like that.”

It was easy for me to guess the truth.

I knew at once that Jean had gone to the lawyer’s, acting in her impetuous but interfering zeal. What an idiot she had made of herself! And oh, how I hated her at that moment!

“So *that* is what you think of me?” I said calmly.

“If it hadn’t been for the Binnings and their kindness,” he went on harshly, “I don’t know how I should have pulled through. I’m pretty well stranded. I’ve lost my billet. There’s no chance of my getting back to Tindalls’. Yet there’s the dear old Admiral treating me just as if I were his son. And as for Mrs. Binning and Jean—I simply can’t speak of their kindness!”

“So Jean is nice to you, is she?”

At that moment Jean whirled past in a Troubadour's arms, then stopped for a second at our side.

"Hello, Teresa!" Jean said. "Having a good time?"

"Yes, thank you. Are you?"

"Nicest I ever had in my life!"

Her brown eyes were radiant, heightened by the blue-black Egyptian gown powdered with stars that threw up also the purple lights in her luxuriant black hair. Her arms were bare from the shoulders, and gleamed white and round from many curious Eastern bracelets and bangles and quaint heavy rings, and in her left arm she was clasping a huge bunch of purple-blue lilies.

"Supper after this dance!" she laughed up to Patrick, with an air of appropriation that cut me like a knife.

"I'll come and fetch you," he said.

"Do!" She whirled away again.

Across the room there was a big looking-glass hanging on a wall, and therein I could see reflected a little black Columbine with a white face and golden hair, and slender black silk legs merging from a whirl of dainty skirts of black and foamy tulle; an audacious little pointed hat set athwart her yellow tresses, while little bows of black tulle fluttered at her slender wrists and about her young, white throat. She tossed her head, the little black Columbine in the glass, and looked up into the pale set face of the young man in a black domino looking down at her.

"You were in a great hurry to believe that I'd broken my word," I burst out. "You never paused or hesitated a moment to consider whether it was true or not. Why should you? You took for granted I should do so, didn't you? And that, I suppose, is why you never wrote to me for days afterwards."

“I could not bring myself to write.”

“But—just for the sake of argument—doesn’t it make any difference to you to think that I took that step *to save you*?”

“You broke your word. That’s all that matters to me.”

“Oh, you egoist!” I said, speaking slowly, but feeling the hot blaze of that miserable jealousy in every fibre and vein of my being—“you egoist! The truth about you is simply this, Patrick Hall, and I see it now at last—you put yourself and your own point of view before everything else. It’s your conceit that’s wounded—nothing else. It’s just your vast, blatant, overwhelming vanity that’s suffering. I understand it all now. You’d made up your mind that you were a very fine fellow, that you had a will of iron, and a brain that could fight and conquer any one. And you’d made up your mind that because you were so wonderful and forceful and clever, you could get yourself out of that tangle without any one’s assistance—especially the assistance of the girl you had professed to care for. You wanted to impress her; you wanted her to look up to you and set you on a pedestal, and say how splendid and strong and all-conquering you were! In your great, superb, magnificent pride you wouldn’t allow her to lift a little finger for you for fear your reputation as a man who could do everything for himself might suffer. At last I see you as you are!”

I turned and walked rapidly away.

I nearly ran into Oscar Courtney.

He was looking sulky, but I rushed to him so gladly, with such an air of delighted relief, that his brow cleared quickly, and his handsome face grew happy again.

"Supper?" he asked joyfully.

"No, no! Let's dance."

"But wouldn't you like an ice?"

"I'd hate it!"

I shuddered.

I felt I'd rather die than go into the supper-rooms and see those two—my friend and the man who had professed to care for me—having supper together.

"Come—waltz, waltz, waltz!" I cried. "It's better than talking, any day!"

I danced and danced and danced first with one man and then with another, but most of all with Oscar Courtney.

Was it jealousy that was prompting me?

Just simple, ordinary, undiluted jealousy, such as comes to every woman some time or other in her life, but had never come to me before?

Perhaps.

For it seemed to me that every time I turned my head there was Jean Binning and Patrick near her.

I saw them in a box high up, leaning out, Jean's dark head close to Patrick's fair one.

I saw them in the great procession, Jean on Patrick's arm, looking like the loveliest Cleopatra that had ever stepped out of the pages of history.

And once, as I was about to sink into a chair in the palm-lounge, I discovered them there under the drooping palms, Jean lying back with a cigarette between her lips, looking the picture of bliss, while Patrick in another big chair smoked and watched her, apparently as full of content as she was.

But I spoke no more to either of them that night, for which I was devoutly thankful; and in the small hours of the morning Peggy and I went home together, nestling close in Bobbie's luxurious white-



lined Limousine, with Bobbie and Oscar sitting opposite to us, sleepy but happy.

“Don’t be silly!” I was saying pettishly to Oscar.

“I’m not silly—I mean it. You don’t believe me. All right. I do mean it all the same though!”

And that was how the ball ended, the voice of the man I was indifferent to ringing in my ears, and the man who meant everything in the world to me going home with the Binnings, to Southwater, by the first train in the morning.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### BY THE SCHOOLROOM FIRE

DUSK was gathering in the schoolroom, where Peggy and I sat chatting by the fire.

"Who's in here?" cried a voice at the door.

"That you, Hilary?" I called out. "It's only Peggy and I having a yarn."

Hilary came in slowly, and looked at us curiously, then looked away.

"Girls, I've got news for you."

She was reddening a little, and smiling.

"I've promised to marry Arthur," she got out presently.

Of course we did our best to be surprised, Peggy and I, though as a matter of fact we had known for ages this was going to happen. We kissed her and fussed over her, and made room for her between us on the sofa, and there we three sisters sat, side by side, before the schoolroom fire, where we had roasted chestnuts ever since we could remember, and apples too, and even potatoes when we got the chance.

"Arthur wants me to go down and stay at Southwater with Jean," Hilary went on presently. "Do you know, I believe Jean's in love in real earnest at last! What a trifler she has always been before. It's that Patrick Hall, who once saved the Admiral's life. Arthur's sure of it. He says the Admiral's determined to put Patrick on his feet again. He's going to lend

him enough capital to start on his own with. Arthur says he'll perhaps buy a partnership in some small iron business and then work it up. It's awfully good of the Admiral, isn't it? But of course we know very well why he's doing it"—with the little air of complacent oneness with the Binning family that had come to her already. "It's for Jean's sake. I suppose the next thing will be that Patrick and Jean are engaged."

Very still I sat, very still indeed, clasping my hands tight in my lap.

"I love this dear old schoolroom," said Peggy suddenly, the firelight leaping on her pretty piquant face with its setting of wonderful ruddy hair, while her little white jewelled hands clasped themselves comfortably in her purple taffeta lap, her elbows resting lightly on her knees. "I always feel up here a sort of queer, delicious realisation of the fact that once I was a naughty little schoolgirl, drudging away at horrid old French verbs and German genders, and now I'm grown-up and have diamond rings and am engaged to be married to a lord. It's rather nice, isn't it, Hilary?" she said, with a jolly, comfortable, little laugh. "Everybody will say you and I have done pretty well for ourselves!"

"Don't!" I cried harshly. "I can't bear to hear you speak like that, Peggy!"

"Why, darling, what have I said?"

"It sounds as if you didn't really care for Bobbie. You do, don't you, Peg?"

"Care for Bobbie! Why, I worship the very ground he walks on!" said Peggy hotly.

She lifted her elbows from her knees, and sitting bolt upright turned and stared at me with wide, amazed eyes.

"You don't suppose one of us Martindale girls would

marry a man she wasn't in love with, do you ? " she demanded fiercely. " You wouldn't do it yourself ; why should you think I would ? "

Her eyes were sparkling. The sudden wave of indignation had brought an extra glow into her lively, adorable face. And I knew that she was not pretending. Her love for Bobbie was as real as everything else about her.

" Teresa, it'll be your turn next," cried Hilary suddenly. " I'm sure Oscar Courtney won't wait much longer ! "

They laughed, but I got up and slipped away.

Downstairs I went into the drawing-room, wandering along like one in a dream, scarcely knowing where I was going or what I was doing. Somehow I found a sofa and then a cushion. After that the world faded, washed right away by this tide of bitter flavour that had caught me unawares on life's deceitful yellow sands. The house was very still. Up in the school-room Peggy and Hilary were nursing their knees over the fire and exchanging confidences. The younger children were out shopping with Aunt Anna. The whole place had lost its life, and was hollow and empty as some vast coffin waiting for its victim.

One thought after another walked up to me and tapped me sharply on the head, and I felt too weak to turn away, too weak to deny them, too crushed to make even a pretence at battle. I knew that what they were saying was true. It was true that I had made an idiot of myself—quite true. I had fallen in love, with a horrible wildness, and the man did not care a rap for me !

Then the image of his face rose before me, and I tortured myself still further by allowing my mental vision to drink it in, to stare unhindered at that strange

dominant physiognomy, with its unfaltering eyes and lips that indicated fight.

After that I cried still more.

For a long, long time I cried, knowing that crying was futile, but refusing to deny myself the only luxury Fate had not yet wholly spoiled for me.

The door opened quietly and Sarah came in, carrying a huge jar of flowers. She cast one glance at me, then turned her head away, and walked to a table in the window and put the vase upon it. My heart gave a sickening bound. Country flowers they were—mignonette and wallflowers, such as Patrick had once brought me.

I held my breath and watched Sarah's face. It wore an expression of calm attention to duty, though her mouth was compressed—with disapproval of my tears, I suppose. But she did not look at me again.

"Mrs. Wilson left those for Miss St. Dunstan," she said, going quietly out of the room without another glance in my direction, almost as though she had read my thoughts and was sorry for me.

All this time we had been browsing along, we Martin-dales, with such secure and unhampered freedom that we all seemed to have lost sight of the fact that some day things would be changed, that Aunt Anna's angelic reign would end, and Papa would rule his little kingdom once again. We had taken to the new condition of things like ducks to water, and the news came on us all with something of a shock when we learnt that Papa was entirely well and would be home within a week or two.

"Things will be different then," said Sarah severely, as she brought me a cup of tea in bed one morning and looked down at me with an expression of kindness that belied her sharp words. "Now, you've got a

headache, Miss Teresa. Don't tell me! You are white and peaky. What you want's a change. Shall I put the sugar in for you, dearie? 'Ere's a nice piece of hot buttered toast—watered toast—just the way your Pa 'as it. And when it's a matter of toast, the way your Pa likes it can't be bettered on!"

"Thank you, Sarah. It's lovely!" I said mechanically.

"If I was you, Miss," went on Sarah, picking up a hairpin from my bedroom carpet, "I'd lie it out a bit. After your Pa comes back it'll be eight o'clock breckfusses again, and no more early tea of a morning!"

Big elephantine Sarah!

How kind she was to-day!

I felt so grateful to her that I had to turn my head aside to hide my tears, for since tears had found their way to my eyes they were always coming there nowadays, unwelcome and unannounced.

"Drink up your tea," said Sarah hastily. She patted out my counterpane, glanced at me awkwardly, and left the room at last, while I began to ask myself agitatedly if Sarah *understood*.

Her extreme kindness, her gentleness, that was almost tenderness, made me feel absolutely creepy.

For it was Sarah who had ushered him in that day—Sarah who had brought the dog—Sarah who had handed me his letters!

The thought of Sarah *knowing* made me half mad.

As I was dressing, I began to think of Oscar, who was coming with Bobbie to lunch. I asked myself what I should say if he proposed to me, for the last two weeks had seen him almost as constant a visitor at our house as Bobbie. How could I stop him making love to me? How could I ward off his proposal? Yet I who had suffered so much must surely be the last

person in the world to give another human being pain, for I knew what pain meant, I knew what it meant to be eaten out and in with an endless longing for sight and sound of some one who did not care a rap for one in return.

After lunch that day Oscar and I—thanks to Peggy's and Bobbie's mean machinations—found ourselves alone together in the drawing-room, and Oscar immediately seized his chance.

He might have pleaded with me till Doomsday, I verily believe, had not some mocking, evil little spirit led him to venture upon one tiny question—a question so poignant that it stabbed me to the heart.

“Is there anybody else?” he queried.

And I in terror cried out feverishly:

“No, no, no! There's *nobody* else!”

Then, all in a moment, the only thing that mattered to me in heaven or earth was to prove to the whole world that there was nobody else.

For that, in a sudden blind flood of obsessing shame, I would have sacrificed everything—happiness, comfort, wealth, health, looks—even life itself.

With a ludicrous miscalculation, my destiny seemed to resolve itself into proving to just two people that my heart was whole enough to give to somebody else.

And that was how I came to promise I would marry Oscar.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### “ LA VILLE LUMIÈRE ”

IT was not until after I had been engaged three days that it began to dawn on me that I was giving proof to the whole world when I had only needed to give it to two people.

I began to be restive—terribly, miserably restive.

“ Oscar, I want you to do something for me. Will you do it ? ” I said one day to my fiancé.

“ Of course I will—anything on earth ! ”

“ Anything at all ? ”

“ Yes—anything at all,” he answered promptly.

“ Then I want you not to kiss me for a month ! ”

Oscar looked as if some one had given him a blow in the face.

“ Do you really mean it, Teresa ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You don’t like me, then ? ”

“ I hate being kissed.”

“ Do you mean I’m not even to kiss your cheek ? ”

“ For a month.”

“ It’s awfully rough on me, Teresa. I never see you without wanting to kiss you.”

“ But surely we can be just as good friends without ? ”

“ Oh, it’s absurd, Teresa. It’s not good friends we are. You’re engaged to me, and we’re going to marry. I can’t understand you. Have I got a rough face or——”



“No, no! But if you really care for me, Oscar, do be nice about it. I suppose it’s because I’m not used to it yet——”

He brightened up at that.

Manlike he appeared to relish the idea that I was not accustomed to being in love.

“Has nobody ever kissed you before?” he demanded jealously.

“No,” I said.

I began to go scarlet, and I put my hands against my cheeks to cool them.

“Why, Teresa, Teresa! You’re blushing like a peony.”

He looked suspicious.

“Great Heavens, Teresa! Don’t tell me that you’re—that you’re in love with somebody else!”

“Of course I’m not! How ridiculous! I think you’re a hundred thousand times nicer than any one else. And every day I like you better, Oscar—really I do. You’re a dear. You are so sweet-tempered and amiable that often I feel positively ashamed of myself for being such a cat. In fact, I wonder how you can care about me at all! I’m really not half nice enough for you, and that’s the truth of it.”

We were sitting in the schoolroom, where a great fire of logs was blazing brightly in the wide old-fashioned fireplace, and the odours of sunlight soap from the well-scrubbed tables mingled with the more worldly perfumes of Oscar’s Turkish cigarettes and the faint, sweet tinge of “Idéal” about my person. Side by side on the rickety little sofa we were sitting, ostensibly engaged in making our plans for the future, but as far as I was concerned I left the plans to themselves, and listened silently to all Oscar’s suggestions.

"We'll live part of the time in the country and part in London. You'll like that, won't you, Teresa?"

"I love the country," I answered dully.

"That's ripping. So do I, and we'll spend as much of our time as possible down there at Redlands. It'll be jolly to get away from all the rest of the world—just we two together!"

I shivered, and felt suddenly cold.

"I'll put another log on," said Oscar quickly, and jumping up he rammed the fire for several moments until a magnificent blaze lit up the darkest corners of our rather shabby old schoolroom at the top of the house.

"It's rotten that I've got to go away now," he exclaimed, drawing out his watch and looking at it disconsolately, "but I promised Creay I'd meet him at the Automobile Club at five sharp, and it's just five now. Teresa——"

He stood before me, his hands in his pockets, looking down, and I noted in a sort of far-off way how spruce and smart he was, what a fine figure he had, and how long his eyelashes were when you looked right at them. Why did I not love him? Why? Why? *Why?* Why was my heart like a stone? Why did his kisses make me shiver? Why was I always asking myself how I could ever have been so mad as to betroth myself to a man I didn't care for? Every day his affection affected me more and more desperately. And every day I felt more and more worried at my utter unresponsiveness.

"Teresa, when will you come with me to get the ring?"

"Oscar! Why, that's the very, very last thing of all! You'll be late for Bobbie!"

"All right. I'm going. And I mustn't even give you one little kiss? It's hard lines, Teresa."

He put his hand on my head for a moment, ruffled it, gave me a vexed look, then took himself off. A few minutes afterwards Hilary put her pretty head in, looked round, then smiled, and entered bodily.

“Teresa, do you remember Patrick Hall who came to dinner one night—that boor, you know, whom Papa hated so? Well, Arthur says he’s left Pine Lodge and gone to Paris. It seems there’s nothing between him and Jean after all. Another of Jean’s idiotic romances, I suppose! He’s gone to Paris, as Under-Manager in the Hôtel Blanc—fancy! The Admiral helped him to get in there. How funny it seems to think of Jean imagining herself in love with him!”

She took herself off after a few minutes, and I went up to Aunt Anna’s room.

“Aunt Anna,” I began, in a weary, listless voice, “I do so want to go away. I don’t feel well. Everything tires me. I want a change. I feel if I don’t get away from London immediately I shall go crazy. Will you help me, Aunt Anna? Will you come with me? Mama and Papa will be back to-morrow. Will you take my part and persuade them to let me go away somewhere quite alone with you?”

“Of course I will, Teresa,” the sweet old thing answered immediately.

“Where shall we go to?” I asked her desperately. “I thought of Paris.”

“Yes, we might try Paris,” she answered expectantly.

Whatever she felt she showed no sign of surprise, seeming to enter into my feelings with an exquisite and soothing comprehension.

“In Paris, dear, you could buy some of your trousseau,” she went on quietly.

“Yes—my trousseau!”

I immediately leapt at that as an excuse that would be acceptable all round.

For again I was in the clutches of that mysterious, overwhelming attraction, and was prepared to do anything on earth just to get sight of *him* again.

Aunt Anna's eyes were shining.

"I know a charming and very quiet, if rather old-fashioned, hotel in Paris where we could stay," I murmured diffidently. "It's in the Rue Cambon, near the Tuileries. Papa took us there when we were coming back from Geneva the Hôtel Blanc."

"Ah, and I stayed there when I was a young girl just like you! I should like to go there once before I die," said Aunt Anna eagerly.

Afterwards, looking back on that time, I realised that it was some mysterious quality in Aunt Anna that carried me through and landed me a few days later in the vestibule of the Hôtel Blanc.

I liked the look of the place immediately, and I felt my spirits rise in a strange, unaccountable way as I moved towards the Bureau, Aunt Anna pausing at the door to get her change from the porter. A dear little place it was, white, shining, and brightly lit. I stepped to the Bureau, put down my hand-bag, and opened my lips.

The following sentence was framed on my lips, all ready to be uttered:

"We telegraphed for rooms from London—Miss St. Dunstan was the name!"

But instead I uttered a sharp, unguarded, infantile cry.

Standing there in the Bureau, leaning across the counter towards me, a pen behind his ear, was Patrick Hall.

"*You!*" I gasped idiotically.

Then I spoilt it all by adding, “I heard you were here!”

“I’m Sub-Manager here,” he replied.

“But I thought you were—were prospering in England!” I blurted out, too late to save the situation.

“You were wrong, then.”

“How did you come here?”

“I could get nothing to do in England. So at last I decided to come abroad.”

“But I thought the Admiral was going to—to help you!” I tactlessly exclaimed.

He stiffened at that, and I saw a shade of annoyance cross his face, but before anything more could pass between us Aunt Anna was at my side, and turning away with her I followed the porter upstairs to our rooms, my feet almost dancing along after him.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THE WORLD ?

WHAT had happened to the world ? Only a day ago and grey skies had stretched over weary London, rain had dripped endlessly and depression and gloom had held my heart in cold, remorseless fetters. And now, presto ! What a change !

I woke next morning to see sunlight pouring in—woke to hear the merry twitter of birds in the old stoned courtyard planted with vines and creepers that hung about its pillars, already putting forth their first spring buds.

A dainty maid brought me some chocolate and a roll that seemed to belong to another world from the old prosaic one of Kensington Square. Sitting up in bed, I drank my chocolate leisurely, and looked at myself in the great mirror opposite. I saw a fair-haired girl in a pale-blue silk *matinée* slipped over her nightgown, and she was drinking chocolate out of a dainty cup, and smiling at herself as if the world had used her remarkably well. Was that I ? Why was I smiling like that ? And why had the weight been lifted off my heart as if by magic, and instead of feeling depressed and wretched, why was there a bubbling spring of young, glad, untrammelled happiness dancing in my veins ?

I shut my eyes for a moment and deliberately faced the truth.

It was because I was under the same roof as Patrick Hall that I was feeling and looking like that.

He was here. He was near me. Fate, whose aid I had sought to take me far away from even the thought of him, had deliberately tossed me right into the very same dwelling. But it was Fate's doing. It was not mine. I had taken no hand in it whatever, and I was not going to blame myself. I was simply going to accept things as they were. Yes, I had the sublime audacity to say such a thing as that to myself.

Dressing hastily, I sat down to write to Oscar.

But words seemed to stick on my pen.

What should I say ? How should I write to him ? Would he expect a love-letter ?

After a pretty stiff struggle I finally composed the following epistle :—

“ DEAR OSCAR,

“ We had an awfully nice crossing, Auntie and I, and here we are in Paris. The weather is lovely—sunshine, birds, a look of spring.

“ Somehow I don't believe I was made to live in England. The very thought of going back there fills me with wretchedness. Oscar, I'm afraid it's not a very good sign for the future. Don't you agree with me ? Don't you think it might perhaps be better if I remained permanently away ? And you fell in love with some one else—some one prettier and jollier and brighter than I am ? Tell me, Oscar, truly—don't you think so ? If you do, let us set each other free immediately, for I am sure I don't want to make your life miserable, and I'm afraid that's what I should do if I married you.

“ Yours,

“ TERESA.”

After that I went up to my Aunt's room, and found her nursing a cough, but looking remarkably cheerful all the same.

"I'll stay indoors, my dear, to-day," she said. "My room's so pretty. And it's so nice to see the sun. And how I love to hear about me the chatter of French! Ah, it makes me feel quite young again, Teresa, dear."

"Shall I stay with you, Auntie?" I asked.

"No, darling. Certainly not! Go out in the air and sunshine. You know your way about Paris too well for me to be nervous."

"You're a darling, ideal, fairy-like Aunt," I told her, stooping down and kissing her dainty grey head. "I'll go for a little stroll and buy some flowers."

As I went downstairs, humming to myself, I was thinking of Patrick Hall and wondering if I should see him, never stopping to analyse the deep, incessant interest his doings aroused in me.

Suddenly I came to a stop, and grasping the banister tightly I leaned out of sight behind a monster azalea.

A lump swelled in my throat. Tears blinded my eyes. There below me in the hall, down on his knees, with a duster in his hand, was Patrick Hall, instructing an obviously careless servant how to polish up the wainscoting.

So that was what he had come to—my hero—to dusting the wainscoting in a little third-class French hotel!

Then he went back to the Bureau, and I heard his voice.

He was telephoning an order to the butcher.

Evidently his work was varied and comprehensive,



and included all sorts of duties, but I could see by his expression that he was attacking things with the same old touch, only with some of the high, dauntless spirit gone out of him, leaving his face a little older and a little graver.

He looked up as I passed through the vestibule.

I bowed, reddening, and smiled at him also.

He responded with a formal inclination of the head.

I understood his meaning.

He wished me to realise that there was a great gulf set between us, and he had no intention of bridging it or allowing me to bridge it. He intended me to realise that I was a visitor in the hotel where he was a servant, and I was the fiancé of a rich young English aristocrat, while he was a man who had so far made a desperate failure of his life.

But how absurd that was!

What did I care for things like that!

Every day I found my determination to speak to him growing stronger and stronger. But how persistently he evaded me! Nothing but cold, formal looks and curt business-like words could I elicit from him. When I went to the Bureau to ask for my letters, and remarked what a lovely day it was, and looked at him wistfully as if to hypnotise him into speaking to me and realising that in spite of everything that had happened I was still at heart his friend, he would only vouchsafe me a stiff nod, and would persist in alluding to me as "dix-huit," my room being No. 18.

I had so much to say to him too.

Every day it seemed to me that I had more and more to say.

I was longing to ask him about his acquittal, about Jean; and why should I not tell him now—seeing that I was engaged to another man, and he was appar-

ently gone out of Jean's life—why should I not tell him the truth about Jean going to the lawyer?

But how tiresome it was!

The more I determined to do so, the more persistently he kept me at a distance.

So five whole days went by.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### “ VALSE MAUVE ”

THE sunlight fled on the fifth day. A darkened look came over Paris, and as I wandered along the Boulevard des Italiens, leaving Aunt Anna peacefully napping by the fire, and dreaming over those happy, mysterious memories which evidently held so dear and precious a place in her gentle, faithful heart, I suddenly found myself before the great Sala of the Paris Gramophone records—a place which had always had an irresistible attraction for me. Looking in through the great bare windows I saw those rows of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen sitting there absorbed, silent, holding the little receivers to their ears and having music poured sweetly and insidiously into their brains.

I had been there dozens of times before, and as I went in and changed some pennies for the big nickel pieces which one drops into the slot the manageress smiled and nodded to me as if I were an old friend.

I sat down, put my nickel disc in, and turned on “ Valse Mauve.”

I heard the scraping of violins, the low, deep notes of a 'cello, and the blare of instruments that sounded like trumpets as some far-off Hungarian band played its heart out in this wild, sweet, enchanted music. Never in my life had I heard such a waltz. Listening, it had such an effect on me that I seemed to see great

masses of lilac and even smelt the fragrance. Three times over I listened to it, and then with a sigh I turned to look up something else, coming back to the world with a curious, unreal sense of transformation. I stretched out my hand for the book, and the man in the seat next to me moved it towards me.

He was a big broad-shouldered being in a rough grey overcoat, the collar of which was drawn up round his ears.

And as he turned to me I saw his face.

Instantly it seemed as if a bright light broke over everything, the rain-lit streets without were full of romance, and the "Valse Mauve" beating joyfully its tender, haunting rhythm and scattering the scent of lilac through the intensely silent Sala.

"I came in here to hear some music," I stammered foolishly.

"So did I."

"I like the place."

"Yes."

Our chairs were so close together that our arms were touching, and all of a sudden it came over me that never before had I felt so alone with him except on that ill-fated evening when I had sat by his fireside at Albany Chambers.

I was very nervous, but an impulse surged up in me, and I obeyed it.

"I wish I could speak to you alone," I said.

"Well, we can't speak here!" he replied.

For the first time for ever so long he smiled at me, and it was really pitiful the way I basked in that smile.

I got up, and we went out of the Sala together.

Sharp rain was falling now, whipping the Boulevard des Italiens with a cold, hard touch, and people were

hurrying by in all directions. But just to our right there was a nice, big, cheerful-looking café, with its awning over the street and a cosy little stove burning redly right out in the middle of the footpath.

“ Let’s sit here and have a cup of coffee,” I said.

We seated ourselves at a little table near the stove, and Patrick ordered coffee and cakes, and then a silence fell over us for a few moments—a nervous, desperate kind of silence that I felt I should never be able to break, no matter how I tried. I looked up suddenly, and surprised his eyes fastened on me with a strange glance that somehow set the blood beating wildly through my veins and made the Waltz of the Lilacs ring in my ears again.

“ I suppose I ought to congratulate you,” he said slowly, his eyes lingering all the while on my face. “ Are you to be married soon ? ”

“ Oh, I don’t know—I don’t know ! ” I broke in passionately. “ Don’t let’s speak of that. I want to speak of you—and something quite different. Do you know that you did me a wrong ? ”

He started, and a look of pain came about those set lips of his.

“ I am determined to tell you the truth now,” I went on hastily, with a haunting fear that the moment might be snatched away from me before I had been able to do so. “ Listen ! You wronged me ! I never went to your lawyer ! I never broke my word ! I never spoke of that evening to any living soul ! ”

“ Then who could have told him ? ”

“ I know who it was. Shall I tell you ? ”

“ Most certainly you must tell me.”

“ It was some one you know.”

“ I’m not good at guessing. I can think of no one.”

“ Well, it was Jean Binning ! ”

“ Jean Binning ! ”

He spoke on a sharp note of amazement.

I watched him narrowly, seeking to see how he would take the mention of Jean's name.

“ Jean discovered I had been there. She taxed me with it. I acknowledged nothing. She said if I did not she would go into court herself and tell the truth ! ”

“ Why on earth should she do that ? ”

“ To save *you* ! ” I cried.

A dull-red flush rose to his cheeks.

I guessed what he was thinking of.

I was perfectly certain now that Jean had somehow let him know that she cared for him.

“ Tell me ! ” I cried eagerly, “ why didn't you accept the Admiral's offer ? Now that it's all over and done with surely we can speak plainly to each other ? ”

“ I couldn't take the Admiral's money—it was impossible ! There was a false conception. I learned that he thought I was fond of his daughter.”

“ And weren't you ? ”

All I was conscious of was my longing that this moment in the chilly, open café with the rain beating on the grey canvas overhead, and the clink of cups and bottles, and liqueur and Bock glasses going on ceaselessly around us, should never, never end ; but even as I was thinking that my companion was quietly rising to his feet and looking for me to get up, too, and come away.

Almost in silence I walked along at his side. The rain had ceased now. Dusk was coming on, and the walk back to the hotel seemed incredibly short.

Pacing up and down in front of the hotel was a man in a long, fur-lined coat with his green Homburg hat in his hand and his dark spruce hair shining like a

mirror where the light fell upon its polished smooth surfaces.

An ugly gleam was in his eyes, and it flashed across me that I had never seen Oscar look unprepossessing before. Something cruel, almost malignant, was suddenly revealed in his face as he saw me approaching with Patrick.

“ I thought you were in London ! ” I stammered out feebly.

Patrick, glancing at his watch, murmured that he must hurry away, and even in my agitation I was able to think pitifully that that meant he had to go back to those horrid duties of his.

“ You wrote me that the sun was shining in Paris,” burst out Oscar the moment we were alone, “ and birds were singing and you were so happy here that you thought you’d never come back. Yet when I arrive here I find it colder and wetter than London, and you strolling about with a strange man. Who was he ? I’ve seen his face before somewhere.”

Then there rushed over me a realisation of the awkward situation I had placed myself in.

If Oscar came into the hotel, he would see this man, of whom he was already inclined to be jealous, living in the same hotel with me as under-manager.

“ Don’t come in,” I said, looking backwards into the interior of the hotel, where the lights gleamed through the twilight. “ I—I don’t want you to come in just now.”

“ I am not going to force myself on you,” Oscar answered huffily.

“ Please don’t be cross, Oscar ! ”

“ What do you expect me to be, I wonder ? ”

A frantic desire to keep him from crossing the threshold at all costs was possessing me.

"Auntie's not very well. She's had a cold. But come to-morrow morning, Oscar. Come to lunch. Then we can talk things over. What do you say to lunch at the—at the—er Café Riche? Auntie and I would meet you there at twelve o'clock. How would that be?"

He went sulkily away, and I entered the hotel.

But I knew I was only putting off the evil day.

Sooner or later he was bound to see Patrick Hall behind the office counter! If not to-day or to-morrow, then the next day he would be bound to recognise him as the man I had been having coffee with at the café! And what he would think then Heaven knew!

I ran upstairs to Aunt Anna.

"Were you frightened about me?" I cried, entering her room hastily.

"No, my dear. I've got a visitor!"

A huge man with a clean-shaved, youthful face that was full of kindness and shrewdness and a leonine head of white hair slowly drew his massive figure out of one of Aunt Anna's armchairs, and came towards me.

"This is a very old friend of mine, Teresa. It's Mr. Arnold Holt. We knew each other years ago."

Aunt Anna was all a-flutter.

She looked the prettiest, most bird-like little thing imaginable, with her blue eyes sparkling like bits of lapis lazuli, and her tiny jewelled hands gesticulating gracefully with excitement.

"I like that man, Auntie," I said, when Mr. Holt had made his adieux and left us.

"Isn't it extraordinary!" she whispered, her sweet, thin voice almost breaking under her emotion. "It's thirty years since we saw each other's faces. In this very hotel it was—that last time we saw each other. And now I'm here again, and he's here too."



Aunt Anna suddenly relapsed into silence, and sinking back into her corner of the sofa closed her eyes and seemed to wish to be alone.

I went over to the salon to get a book I had left there, and found the under-manager busily tidying up the papers and magazines on the reading-table.

The room was deserted except for us two.

“ I hope I didn’t get you into trouble,” Patrick said hurriedly, as I went near to him.

“ Of course not. Listen ! I want to ask you something. Does the proprietor of this hotel know—know all about you ? ”

I went scarlet as I spoke.

“ He knows nothing about me,” he replied quietly.

“ How did you get here, then ? ”

“ I came to Paris and looked about me. I had a few pounds between me and starvation. I found it impossible to get anything to do, until one day I saw the Hôtel Blanc advertising for an under-manager who spoke English and understood bookkeeping. I applied and got the job. That’s all about it. They asked for references, and I gave them two people who believed in me—the Admiral and my lawyer. And here I am. I didn’t consider there was any need for them to know why I left Tindalls’. Even when a man’s innocence is proved, the fact that he has been arrested and spent a night in prison goes terribly against him—oh, terribly, incredibly ! ”

“ I’m glad you found a haven,” I whispered back.

Then a fat old German lady came in to read her favourite “ Tageblatt,” and Patrick vanished towards the stairs.

And at the door he suddenly turned and smiled at me.

Well, it would be too utterly idiotic of me to say how happy that second smile made me !

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

“ I HAVE NO FIANCÉ ! ”

NEXT morning Oscar Courtney arrived at eleven o'clock, his arms full of magnificent pink roses and white lilac, and marching straight to the Bureau he handed the flowers across the counter to the attendant.

“ Will you send these up at once to Miss Teresa Martindale ? ” he said.

And there before him, glaring at him across the counter, with a most unamiable expression, was the man he had been thinking about all night !

“ I will see that the flowers are sent up immediately,” said Patrick curtly.

Oscar stared at him.

“ Haven't I met you before ? ” he asked brusquely.

“ I couldn't say. I see so many faces.”

“ Do you mean that you're—you're——”

Words failed Oscar.

“ I'm on the staff of the hotel.”

“ What ! You're living here ! ”

“ Naturally, as I'm the under-manager.”

Oscar suddenly grew violently excited.

“ I remember your face ! ” he said. “ It comes back to me distinctly. I knew I'd seen you somewhere before. I never make a mistake. I've never forgotten a face in my life. You were at the Arts Ball at the Albert Hall ! ”

He broke off suddenly.

For I had noiselessly approached and laid my hand on his arm, having overheard the whole of the interview.

"Shall we go into the salon?" I asked.

And it was in the salon that he revealed how really angry he was.

"That's the man I remember coming up to you and bullying you at the ball. What does this mean? I should like an explanation," he began stormily, the moment the door was shut.

"What explanation do you want?"

"I want to know what the meaning of it all is," he repeated, more stormily still. "First, at the Albert Hall, then yesterday in the street. And now I find him employed in the very hotel you're staying at. By Jove, Teresa! What do you think I'm made of, if you imagine I'm going to stand this?"

"Oscar," I said, "I'm sorry if I've upset you. but you have no right to speak to me like this."

"I have every right. You're engaged to be married to me."

"That has nothing whatever to do with Mr. Hall."

"It has everything to do with him! You've been flirting with him, I suppose. Heavens, Teresa! Flirting with a low, bounding hotel waiter, for that's all he comes to really! I wouldn't have believed it of you!"

"Oscar, I'm afraid that a man who could speak to me like that is a man I should never dream of marrying!"

I moved towards the door.

I was white, and trembling in every limb.

He caught up to me at the door.

"So you're going to throw me over for that fellow," he hissed in a low, sneering voice, that suddenly brought

up before me my first impression of him that night at the Opera House, when I had disliked him and thought him so shallow. "Never mind! I'll get my own back on him, sooner or later!"

He opened the door and passed through, and I sank exhausted into an armchair.

I tried to laugh.

But I was really frightened.

What would he do?

What could he do?

How could he have revenge on poor, innocent Patrick?

I was soon to know—quite soon—much sooner than I expected.

"I have discovered a few interesting facts," he wrote me next day, "and I intend to acquaint the management of the hotel with them without delay, as I am sure they would not care to have in their service a man who had been a thief and in prison and only escaped by his master's clemency."

One wild look I gave, then I flew like a mad thing down the stairs to the Bureau.

There was quite a little crowd about the Bureau—Americans asking for letters, Germans buying stamps, English wanting information. Most were women. Behind the counter Patrick's pale, absorbed face was intent on dealing with their wants. I looked and shivered, seeing how whole-heartedly he had set himself to this work, and realising what a bitter blow it would be to him if the hotel gave him up.

In a fever of impatience I had to wait while an enormous German Frau with her two enormous Fräuleins pestered him about a hundred-and-one absurd little details he could not possibly be supposed to know of.

But how extraordinary was his patience !

In that brief moment as I watched I glimpsed again the rarity of this young man's nature, who having fallen from his high, proud old ideals and ambitions for success in life was sane and courageous enough to do the thing nearest as carefully and patiently as though it were some magnificent work, full of glory and money, instead of ill-paid, almost menial, services, for people like foolish old Frau Mittenburg, and in that brief moment I suffered again the same desperate tugging at my heart-strings that I had experienced when I found him down on his knees with the duster.

“ Could you come up to my Aunt's private sitting-room ? ” I said, when at last I could get near him. “ The—the—er—the window seems to be out of order. It's—it's got stuck.”

I saw how surprised he looked, but that was the best excuse my confused brain was able to think of.

He read the ill-suppressed urgency in my face, and a few moments later he had got rid of all those people, and was knocking at the door of No. 22, the private sitting-room which Aunt Anna and I shared together.

I opened the door myself.

“ Come in ! ” I said—“ come in ! ”

My voice nearly broke with excitement.

“ Aunt Anna is in her own room, with her masseuse. You and I are quite alone. Oh, please forgive me, the window's all right—it isn't that at all. It's something quite, quite different ! ”

At that I locked the door behind me, making no attempt to hide my agitation.

“ But calmly, calmly ! ” said a voice.

It was just his old protective way of speaking to me, and my heart gave a sudden tumultuous leap at being addressed like that again.

But not yet, not yet must I think of myself.

Before the urgency of the trouble I had brought upon him everything must give way.

"I know I'm upset; it's all my fault," I burst out incoherently. "I'm afraid I've been the means of bringing the most dreadful trouble upon you. Some one I know has found out about that wretched prosecution in London. He has found out, and he says he's going to tell the proprietor that you were once arrested in England on a charge of theft!"

I divined in a moment that my news was an exceedingly nasty blow to him.

But he mastered himself instantly.

"Tell me all about it," he said quietly.

I told him.

"Well, I don't pretend that I'm not sorry," he replied. "I am. I was just getting used to my work here, and thought I was fairly secure for a year perhaps, but it's no use crying over spilt milk. If your friend is serious, and really intends to tell his story to the proprietor, I expect it'll mean only one thing for me—the chuck!"

"How awful!"

I wrung my hands.

"I simply can't tell you how distressed I am about it," I went on feverishly. "I'd give anything on earth if it hadn't happened. You believe that, don't you?"—going close to him and putting my hand on his arm with a pleading gesture, that was utterly unconsidered and spontaneous, and took no heed whatever of all that had once passed between myself and this man.

"Nonsense! Of course I believe! I'm trying to think what I'd best do."

He looked at me with a pale, unmoved face, taking

no notice whatever of the little pleading hand on his coat-sleeve.

“ I think the best thing I can do,” he said decidedly, “ is to go to the proprietor myself, and let him hear the story from my own lips. It may make a difference, my telling him, for I can put my point of view before him, and the real truth about the matter, before your friend has a chance to tell his side.”

He moved away towards the door.

“ No, no ! Wait ! ” I cried. “ Don’t do that ! Wait, wait ! Let us think. After all, perhaps I can stop him from giving that information about you. Oh, surely I can stop him ! I hadn’t thought of that before ! ”

“ Why is your friend so bitter against me ? ” he asked suddenly.

“ Because he—he has a mean nature,” I answered hurriedly.

I went scarlet, however, as I spoke.

“ But why should he vent his mean nature upon me ? ” he continued inexorably, his eyes fixed on the two red signals of distress and confusion in my cheeks.

“ I don’t know ! ”

“ Of course you do ! ”

I was silent.

“ Who is he ? ”

Still I was silent.

“ Won’t you tell me ? ”

“ No.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ I prefer not to.”

“ Oh, it doesn’t matter. I guess who it is ! ”

“ I shall tell you nothing ! ”

“ Of course it was he. It was your fiancé ! ”

“ I have no fiancé.”

“What do you mean?”

“Exactly what I say.”

He started, and I saw a strange look come into his eyes.

“Your engagement isn’t broken off? . . . Is it?” he asked quietly.

“It is!”

“But why?”

I turned my head away and stared at the photographed Mona Lisa over the mantelpiece, with her sly, indifferent, mocking smile.

I was frightened at what I had seen in those clear eyes of his, and I suddenly began to tremble—tremble and shrink—for it seemed to me that in another moment all the barriers must go down before us.

Would my face be on his breast? . . . And would his arms hold me so tight, so fast, that no tiniest fraction of pain or care would have a chance to creep in through the shining portals that shut us away from all the grey old wearying, worrying world? . . .

“May I come in?” said a voice.

I flew to the door and unlocked it, and Oscar Courtney walked into the room.

Pausing on the threshold, he stood staring from me to Patrick and from Patrick to me.

“I seem to be intruding!” he said politely.

“You should have had yourself announced,” I told him reprovingly, summoning all my dignity and doing my best to appear calm and unconcerned.

“I asked at the Bureau if you were in or engaged, and they told me that—that the official was up here seeing about a window, so I came along.”

He threw a look at Patrick, who returned it with a perfectly emotionless stare.

So it was war to the knife between them—the man I loved and the man I had been engaged to!



“ I am sorry I wasn't announced,” said Oscar. “ But when I opened my pocket-book I discovered I had come out without any cards. Look ! You can see for yourself—nothing but bank-notes ! ”

He held open his pocket-book and showed the little compartment for cards, and I saw that the compartment was empty.

“ Oh, it doesn't matter at all,” I said hastily.

I moved close to Patrick, reckless of Oscar's presence, and whispered passionately, “ Do nothing. Wait ! ”

He went out of the room swiftly, closing the door behind him, and I turned to Oscar Courtney with my heart all on fire for the man I was going to plead for.

Unfortunately I was not wary enough to hide my feelings.

“ Oscar ! ” I cried fiercely, “ surely you wouldn't be so mean as to try and spoil another man's chances ? ”

“ That's what I came to see you about.”

“ Won't you sit down ? ”

“ No thank you.”

“ Would you like a cigarette ? ”

“ No thank you.”

His expression frightened me a little, it was so cold and sneering and disagreeable.

But I had a cause to plead.

And I was determined—quite determined—I should win !

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### “ LIKE MADNESS ON THE BRAIN ”

“ LISTEN, Oscar ! ” I said, in as gentle a voice as I could command. “ I know that I’ve not behaved at all well to you, and I’m very, very much to blame. In the first instance I should never have become engaged to you. It was *awfully* wrong of me. Believe me, we’re not in the least suited to each other.”

“ When did you find that out ? ” he asked. “ Since you fell in love with the head-waiter, isn’t it ? ”

“ Oh, Oscar—don’t, don’t ! How can you let yourself speak like that ? He’s not a head-waiter. He’s the under-manager. He’s a brave man too. He’s had a terribly hard time, and even if you don’t like him, Oscar, I beg you, I implore you, not to try and injure him ! Promise me you won’t ? ”

“ What will you do for me if I promise ? ”

“ What is there I can do ? ”

“ Marry me, and let this whole confounded affair pass into oblivion ! ”

“ But I don’t love you, Oscar !—I don’t love you ! ”

I felt like a rat caught in a trap.

“ Never mind ! I’ll make you care for me. You’re angry with me now. You’re such an absurd, quixotic little creature, and having taken up the cause of this fellow Hall, you can think of nothing else. Well, if I promise to keep his secret, and not only that, but to do all I can to give him a lift, will you return to England,

and we'll begin the preparations for our marriage? And let's have a double wedding with Peggy and Creay, Teresa. Will you do that?”

“No!” I said fiercely.

A bitter look crossed his face, but if I had expected any outburst from him I was agreeably disappointed.

He turned and picked up his hat.

“Well, I'll leave you,” he said quietly.

But for all his quietness, as he took himself out of the room I had a curious panic-stricken feeling of something concealed, waiting to spring.

One last effort I made.

“Tell me you won't go to the proprietor!” I whispered brokenly, my voice giving way suddenly under the stress of all this worry.

“My dear Teresa, don't worry yourself!” he said suavely. “I'm not going to put myself out over a matter that's no concern of mine. Set your mind at ease. I've no ill-will against the fellow. I'm quite willing to believe what you say—that he wasn't really guilty of the theft. Since it means so much to you, I shall take it for granted he's not a thief and he doesn't need watching. And so—I'll hold my tongue. Good-bye!”

“Oh, thank you—thank you!” I cried.

But he had gone, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

He had said he would hold his tongue, and yet the moment I was alone, and his footsteps were dying away down the bare, beeswaxed corridor, a feeling of inexplicable unrest swept over me. I stood staring down into the fire, trying to calm myself. Then I went to the piano and began to play, my fingers wandering into a tender, caressing ballade of Chopin's, the beginning of which always seems to me the most exquisitely

hopeful and tender thing ever written, almost like a mother's hand stroking one's head when things have gone wrong and one's tired spirit crept back to the knee, the dear, unfailing maternal knee—that meant all the solace and comfort in the world always.

## CHAPTER XL

### SPRING SONG

THE little yellow canary lifted his head and stared reflectively across the pink flower-filled room.

Everything was so harmonious and charming that I felt my agitation gradually subsiding.

I went to Aunt Anna's bedroom to see how she was getting on, but I found that the masseuse had not quite finished with her.

"She's taking the wrinkles out marvellously," nodded Aunt Anna, with her face thick with white, nice, sniffy cream, that the little black-haired French-woman was deftly working into the withered skin.

"Go and play something, darling," added my Aunt. "It's so nice to be massaged to music!"

"Auntie, you're a sybarite!" I laughed.

"Play the Spring Song," she nodded gently, evidently delighted with the cognomen I had bestowed upon her.

So I went back to the sitting-room and played the flower-filled and bird-haunted Spring Song, till the room seemed full of love and rapture. Such joy! Such ecstasy of sunlight and white buds bursting in dewy lanes, and gay blue wavelets breaking in white foam on fairy-like beaches. But, above all, such love—the love of man for woman—that was what I was feeling as I was playing. . . .

"Mademoiselle, pardon if I intrude, but I haf

knocked several times at ze door and I zink you do not hear me for ze music. May I have ze kindness to give a word with you ? ”

My hands fell on the keyboard, crashing out a vast discord.

All in a moment the terror I had been trying to assuage returned, for there before me stood Monsieur Arcot, the proprietor of the hotel !

“ Come in ! ” I cried hastily. “ Has anything happened, Monsieur ? ”

“ Ze English gentleman haf lost his pocket-book,” he explained, smiling and bowing and throwing out his hands in deprecating gestures, and exclaiming how desolate he was to intrude on me. “ He have left it here he tink,” he added quickly.

“ Pocket-book ? ”

“ Full of money it was.”

“ Well, if Mr. Courtney left it here it must be here,” I said. “ Nobody’s been inside the room since Mr. Courtney went.”

I began to look about everywhere, while the proprietor followed suit.

“ On the table, perhaps. . . . No, no . . . not zere. . . . Ze ozer table, perhaps ? . . . No, no, not here ! . . . On ze sofa, perhaps ! . . . perhaps under ze cushions ? No, no . . . not zere ! . . . On ze piano. . . . No, not on ze piano ! *Under* ze sofa, perhaps. . . .” He got down laboriously on his knees and looked under the sofa. “ No, no . . . no sign of it zere.”

He repeated that performance with all the chairs, I in the meantime searching in every direction.

“ The pocket-book is not here ! ” I said, at last, clasping my cold and trembling fingers together.

“ Ze pocket-book is not here,” agreed Monsieur Arcot.

“Where is Mr. Courtney ? ”

“He wait downstairs, making inquiries.”

“Then will you kindly go and send him up. And will you come back, too, please ? ”

“Yes, Mademoiselle ! ”

I went to Aunt Anna's room, and to my relief I found her finished with her massage and becomingly gowned in a *matinée* of lavender *crêpe de Chine* and lace, her hair carefully coiffured.

I told her what had happened, and she came with me to the sitting-room.

“I want you to sit here—it soothes me to look at you, and I'm—I'm a little upset ! ”

“Are you, darling ? Oh, I'm so sorry ! ”

“But you look so sweet and dainty, Auntie, and your skin's so lovely after the massage, that I feel better ! ”

But all the while I was talking I was listening, listening, waiting for those footsteps to come back, and trying to ignore the desperate sinking at my heart.

Then they were back, and I was face to face with Oscar, and all in a minute that desperate sinking had disappeared and I felt myself buoyed up on some strong, triumphant tide. A sort of almost supernatural strength took possession of me. I felt there was a fight ahead, but I was ready for it—aye, more ready than Oscar Courtney had dreamed of.

“So you've lost your pocket-book, Oscar ? ” I began.

“Yes. I left it here.”

“Are you sure you left it here ? ”

“Quite sure ! You remember me showing it to you ? ”

“Yes, I remember you showing it to me.”

“Perhaps you remember my telling you it was full of bank-notes ? ”

"I remember it perfectly."

"How much was zere exactly?" inquired Monsieur Arcot.

"About £200 in English money."

Monsieur Arcot wrung his hands.

"Mademoiselle has never left the sitting-room," he said.

Oscar shrugged his shoulders.

"It was a foolish thing of me to say aloud that my pocket-book was full of bank-notes."

"But there was no one to hear!" said Monsieur Arcot—"no one except Mademoiselle."

Oscar looked at him regretfully.

"I'm sorry to say there was some one else," he said.

"Your under-manager was in the room at the time, though he left it a few moments afterwards."

Monsieur Arcot uttered a shocked exclamation.

"But surely, Monsieur Courtney, you do not imply——"

"I imply nothing. I only know my pocket-book has gone."

With a loud exclamation of horror Monsieur Arcot rushed from the room.

"I go to the Bureau and find him and bring him to you!"

"Yes. I'd like to see him," said Oscar.

I turned away, and walking up to the canary deliberately put my lips against the cage and whistled to him softly, gaily, as though I hadn't a thought in the world but coaxing him to chirp back at me.

Then Monsieur Arcot returned.

"I am *désolé*!" he cried horrifiedly. "Monsieur Hall has gone out. So strange. He never go out at zis hour. But to-day he gone out!"



“Very likely,” sneered Oscar. “That’s just what he would do! I don’t suppose you’ll ever see him again!”

“A gentlemanly speech!” said I.

Our eyes met—Oscar’s and mine—and I saw that his were full of ill-suppressed triumph, though he was doing his best to appear as if the affair was causing him the greatest distress.

“Look here, Teresa,” he said, assuming a mournful tone, “it’s no good beating about the bush any longer. Monsieur Arcot must be told the truth. Heaven knows I didn’t mean to tell it. But it’s quite evident now that this man Hall is a thorough bad hat. I put my pocket-book down, having remarked that it was full of money. He leaves the room. Then he leaves the hotel! Well, look here, M. Arcot, here’s the truth about your under-manager. He’s a well-known suspected thief over in England; he was actually arrested on a charge of theft, and only got off by some trickery or other. I came here to-day to discuss the matter with Miss Martindale, but she, being very soft-hearted, begged me to give the fellow a chance and not betray him. And this is what comes of it! This is what comes of giving a fellow like that a chance!”

“Monsieur Arcot,” I said quietly, “believe nothing. Mr. Hall was proved not guilty. And I *know* he was not guilty.”

Across the room hung a Chippendale mirror, and therein I could see a girl’s face framed in masses of fair, waving hair. Her lips were red and smiling. Her eyes shone. Her cheeks had soft, rosy tints in them. And as I looked it flashed across my sub-consciousness that I had read somewhere that the great actress, Eleanora Duse, when she wishes to portray a woman telling lies puts on a bright, gay, happy

look, smiles, and assumes a livelier, freer, more joyous manner.

“ And as for the pocket-book ”—I looked round at them all and smiled deprecatingly—“ in a fit of unpardonable chagrin *I threw it in the fire !* ”

## CHAPTER XLI

“THEY SAID IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE !”

“I BURNT it myself, and now the only thing to do is to repay you the exact amount of money that was in the book.”

I fixed my eyes on Oscar's face, and if anything was wanted to confirm my suspicions it was his expression.

“How much was there exactly ?” I demanded sharply.

He turned scarlet.

“Ah, you have compunction, have you ?” I said witheringly. “You're reluctant to take the money. Now I wonder *why* you're reluctant ?”

He looked as if he were doing his best to recover from an unpleasant shock.

“It isn't a question of money,” he muttered uncomfortably.

“Horrible man !” I said to him steadily. “If it isn't a question of money, what is it a question of, then ? Of spite, of malice, of revenge ! Oh, I understand you, you see ! Other people may believe in you, but not I ! You wanted to ruin an innocent man. That was your sole motive.”

“Teresa, my dear Teresa !” ejaculated Aunt Anna in dismay.

But I was too filled with anger to be restrained by her gentle touch.

“Mr. Courtney has tried to ruin a man whose boots he is not worthy to clean !” I cried, addressing myself to Monsieur Arcot and Auntie simultaneously. “It’s the meanest, most despicable thing I’ve ever known. And when I think I once came near to marrying a man who could be guilty of such meanness I simply shudder at the escape I’ve had. I wouldn’t be your wife”—fixing my eyes on Oscar’s with a glance of burning scorn—“for all the millions in the world ! And I insist on your taking that money !”

But Oscar picked up his hat, put his hand through Monsieur Arcot’s arm, and drew him out of the room, shutting the door behind him with what sounded suspiciously like a bang.

“He’s gone !” said Aunt Anna, in consternation.

“Thank God !” I replied.

“But what’s happened, Teresa ? Don’t you love him any more ?”

“Love him ! I hate the very thought of him !”

Going close to her I threw my arms about her and burst into tempestuous tears.

“Oh, I expect I’m going to get into terrible trouble,” I wailed. “I’ve broken off my engagement.”

“Well, if you don’t love him, dear, you can’t marry him.”

“It’s worse than that, Aunt Anna. I love some one else !”

“Then you must marry the ‘some one else.’”

“Oh, how easy it sounds when you say it. But, no ! It’s impossible ! I can never, never marry the man I love.”

Aunt Anna grew curiously agitated.

“My dear,” she said fiercely, “take my advice and let nothing come between you if you love each other !”

“But I’m afraid it’s impossible, Aunt !”

“That’s what they said to me!”—more fiercely than before. “And look at me now! Here I am, a withered little old woman, alone in the world, no husband, no children, my life ruined that might have been so full of happiness, and all because they said it was *impossible*!”

She drew me to the sofa, and made me lie down, shaking up the cushions in her gentle, delicate touch, and then covering me with a fur coat which she fetched from her bedroom. She sprinkled my forehead with a little eau-de-Cologne, and put a bottle of smelling-salts beside me. Then she drew down the blinds and darkened the room a little, considerably carrying away the canary into her own sleeping apartment, for fear his singing might disturb my slumbers.

When I awoke, it was six o’clock.

Aunt Anna was bending over me.

“Darling, I wouldn’t have waked you,” she said, in her gentle, bird-like voice, “only we promised to dine at the Ritz to-night with Mr. Holt, and he’s calling for us at seven in his car.”

“Has Patrick come back?”

I sat up and looked confusedly at Aunt Anna, my thoughts struggling back to reality after the heavy, dreamless slumber.

Aunt Anna shook her head.

“I have asked several times,” she said, “but the answer has always been the same. He has not come back yet, and Monsieur Arcot is very much upset about it.”

“He will come back!” I retorted calmly.

“You seem quite sure of it, my love!”

“I’m as sure of it as if—as if—well, as if he were *you*, Aunt Anna, and I can’t say anything better than that.”

And the curious thing was that I meant it !

For in my sleep there had come to me a sort of heavenly and angelic confidence, and all my old belief in Patrick's strength and goodness seemed to have been revived, with a resurrection as wonderful as that which breaks over bare trees when spring turns them into happy leafage.

## CHAPTER XLII

### AN AMERICAN TO THE RESCUE

A ROUND table set with pink roses and pink, shaded candles ; an orchestra playing the latest snatches of Ragtime and waltzes ; the hum of cultured voices, the glitter of silks and satins, the gleam of jewels, the gay, high-pitched laughter of beautiful American women, and the more dulcet tones of chic Parisiennes and Englishmen ; and in the midst of it all, apparently enjoying ourselves mightily, Aunt Anna and I and Arnold Holt, and a young man who had been invited, I presumed, to keep me in company.

My heart was too full of some one else just then to have a thought to spare for the nicest young man in the world, but all the same I found myself curiously interested in Arthur Reddow, the young, clean-shaved Philadelphian who held an official appointment in Paris.

I listened with keenest interest to something he was saying, and hung breathlessly on Arnold Holt's rejoinders.

For all the while, hearkening to those two wealthy, successful, leisured men, I was thinking of some one poor and tried and struggling, some one whom luck had treated cruelly, some one who was trying alone and single-handed to fight a valiant battle with life, and so far with terrible unsuccess.

"A man doesn't want to be born rich," Arthur

Reddoo was saying emphatically. "He wants to be born poor. That's his best capital."

I started and looked at him.

"Do you *really* think so?" I cried, imploringly, making no effort to disguise my interest.

"I'm sure of it!" he replied, and Arnold Holt nodded his acquiescence. "Nearly every millionaire in America began without a dime. It's the mental and moral exercise in fighting for one's bread-and-butter that stretches the sinews of one's soul, quickens the perception, concentrates the ambition, and acts on the will like dumbbells on the muscles. Isn't that so, Holt?"

"I began life with a three-cent piece," laughed our big, genial host, the diamond stud twinkling gaily in his vast white expanse of shirt-front, and his kind, shrewd eyes full of humanity as well as purpose. "If I'd a daughter, I'd far rather give her to a poor man than a rich one—provided the man was the right man."

Aunt Anna sighed delicately, and toyed with her pêche Melba.

Looking at her, I wondered what had come between her and this kind, strong man in the years gone by, and I made a pretty shrewd guess at it.

My heart lightened, for something told me that as long as it was a question of love Aunt Anna would be my partisan.

"But this talk's very dull for Miss Teresa," said Mr. Holt suddenly, his eyes twinkling at me across the pink roses.

"Indeed it isn't!" I exclaimed. "I love it!"

We sat so long over that dinner that we decided it was too late to go to the theatre, so Mr. Holt drove us in his car back to our hotel.



As we drove, I was thinking of Patrick.

Was he back yet ?

Should I see his face behind the Bureau counter when I went to get our keys ?

I looked about me vaguely, for the night was warm, and we had the car half open, the better to see the lights and street scenes of night-loving Paris.

Suddenly I uttered a loud cry.

So loud it was and so startling that Aunt Anna and Mr. Holt both started in alarm.

"Oh, Mr. Holt!" I cried frantically, "stop! stop! I've seen some one I know! I *must* get out! Quick, quick! There's not a minute to lose. He's just turning that corner!"

The car stopped, and like a mad thing I was out and flying round the corner aforesaid, the train of my pink satin frock in my hand.

"Stop!—stop!" I cried, in a breathless, gasping voice.

I clutched the arm of a rough grey overcoat.

Some one turned round sharply.

"Where are you going?" I continued breathlessly.

"Oh, and what are you doing with—with those things!"

For there was Patrick Hall carrying a heavy bag in one hand with a rug and an umbrella and a small valise in the other.

His face was drawn and set.

"I'm leaving the hotel!" he said laconically.

"They've sent you away!"

"Yes. You were unsuccessful, I presume, with your friend, for he evidently told Arcot that I had once been charged with theft."

"Where are you going?"

I looked round me passionately, experiencing a wild

and futile desire in my rage and pity to wreak vengeance on every one and everything for the way this man had been treated, and as I did so my eyes fell on the large and comely personality of Aunt's old American friend, who, in evening dress with a light overcoat and his opera hat tilted a little rakishly on one side, stood a short distance off waiting to see that no harm came to me.

I rushed to him.

"Mr. Holt," I said breathlessly, "I want to speak to this man—he's in trouble ; I must see him alone ! "

"We'll go over to my apartment," he replied, with a promptitude that fairly took away my breath.

Next moment a pair of elephantine arms had lifted me as though I were a feather into the big, luxurious car, and a second later, after a moment's brief discussion, Patrick followed with Mr. Holt, and the car rushed round to the American's flat.

"You shall have your conversation out in the library," whispered Mr. Holt, as we entered the beautiful suite which he had taken for the season. "You see, I have a home here, although I go to the Hôtel Blanc daily for luncheon—for—the sake of old memories as much as for lunch." He looked at Aunt Anna. "You and I, my friend, will entertain each other with a little reminiscing in the salon."

## CHAPTER XLIII

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY STUPID ? ”

HE did it all with such easy swiftness that I scarcely seemed to know where I was until I heard the door shut, and looking round me found myself in a book-lined room, where a fire of logs was burning in an open fireplace and an air of wealth and luxuriance, combined with rare taste, prevailed.

At my side, pale, shabby, and broken-down stood Patrick waiting to learn what I wanted of him.

“Do you think me very bold ? ” I said.

He shook his head.

He seemed too tired and dejected to speak.

There was a lump in my throat, and it was all I could do to keep it down.

“You look so tired,” I pleaded. “Do sit in this nice big chair of Mr. Holt’s and rest.”

“What did you want to see me about ? ”

But when he put that question to me I discovered that I had utterly forgotten what I had wanted. So pale he looked, so sad and weary, that try as I would to calm myself, a dimness would keep creeping over my eyes, and I had to turn away and blow my nose hard on my little lace handkerchief. Then I kicked the logs recklessly with my pink satin toe, and pretended to arrange the fire a moment.

“I was afraid,” I said, at last, turning round, “that if you disappeared I might never see you again ! ”

“ Very likely not ! ”

“ Oh ! Do you mean that ? ” I cried, in tones of acute reproach. “ Do you really mean you’d have vanished altogether and I should never have seen you again ? ”

“ Seeing me can’t possibly do you any good.”

There was a bitter curve to his lips that I had never seen there before.

“ Oh, don’t, don’t look like that ! ” I cried. “ It—it breaks my heart ! ”

I put my hands on his arm.

“ It breaks my heart ! ” I repeated, in a fierce little gulping voice, the intensity of which frightened even me myself.

Dead still he stood, staring speechlessly at those hands on his coat-sleeve, but making no movement to touch or take them in his own.

“ Do you think I’m a stick or a stone ? ” I cried passionately, “ that I can see you suffer like this and not suffer too ? What do you think I’m made of, I wonder ? Why, I’m a woman——” My voice broke, and tears came rushing down my cheeks, splashing over the pink satin of my skirts and falling hot and scalding on my hands as they still clung there to his coat-sleeve, refusing to let go their hold. “ I’m a woman, and you’re a man, and you—you—oh, why are you making it so awfully hard for me, Patrick ? ”

“ What am I making hard ? ”

“ But perhaps you don’t care for me any more ? ”

I took my hands away and moved back.

“ Who’s talking about ‘ care,’ ” he said, in a dry, harsh voice that I scarcely recognised as his.

“ I am ! ” I said.

“ Are you teasing me ? ” the queer voice asked after a minute. “ Surely it would be a bad time to try and

tease me, when you find me down on my luck, turned out of a second-rate hotel in Paris at a moment's notice ? ”

“ How blind you are ! How dense ! How stupid ! ” I remarked deliberately, emphasising each word as hard as I could.

“ What do you mean by stupid ? ”

“ Oh, I mean—I mean—*idiotic* ! ”

He looked at me in silence.

“ I suppose you know what *idiotic* means,” I said firmly.

“ Perhaps I don't. Though I know I ought to.”

“ Well, it means—it means blind when you've got eyes to see with.”

I was getting cross now.

There was a moment's silence, and then he took a sudden sharp step towards me, and laid his hands on my shoulders with a grip so fierce that it was all I could do to keep from wincing.

“ Teresa,” said a voice.

“ I want——” I began.

But I looked up and met his eyes, and my sentence was never finished.

Suddenly I was kissing him, even as he was kissing me, hungry lips against hungry lips at last.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### “LET’S TALK ”

“It isn’t right,” his voice was whispering. “It isn’t fair! I’m at the end of my tether and you’ve the world before you.”

“Bunkum!” I said, tossing Geoff’s word towards him with such unexpectedness that he found himself laughing.

“Come and sit beside me on the sofa,” I went on presently, noticing with a sharp pang how haggard and wan he was, in spite of the happiness gleaming in his eyes.

But he made me sit on the sofa, and throwing himself down on the rug at my feet he leaned his head against my knee, and closed his eyes.

“And now, let’s talk,” I said, putting my hand shyly on that rough, fair hair, and feeling all the love and solicitude in my nature rising to the surface before his depression. “First, let me tell you, though, that nothing on earth would make me give you up again. It’s no good. I simply couldn’t live without you, and that’s the truth of it. I’ve learnt my lesson. I know it perfectly. No suffering, no hardship, would be too great for me as long as I am with you.”

“How wonderful you are! So brave and strong in spite of your smallness and fragility.” He heaved a heavy sigh, and drawing my hand down held it against his lips. “I, with my talk of courage and

success, always seem to come creeping back to you for help and comfort.”

“Thank God you do! Oh, Patrick, you don’t know what it means to a woman to feel that a man sometimes turns to her, and lets her believe she can really lighten his cares a little.”

“But I’ve no future. I’ve no prospects.”

“Poor boy! You’re depressed! You’re tired and overstrained. To-night you’ve had a nasty shock. Your future is all right. You know that as well as I do”—looking down on the head that nestled against my knee, as a mother might have looked at a poor tired child’s. “This is the dark hour with you. But the good one will return.”

“Do you mean to say you really believe in me?”

“I should think I did! As a matter of fact, I never felt more absolutely and entirely certain that you’re going to make your mark in the world than I do at this moment.”

“You angel!”

He jumped up, and throwing himself down beside me on the sofa seized me in his arms and smothered me with kisses.

“You were made for love, not for hardship,” he said. “You soft little, sweet little thing, with your lips, your eyes, your tiny hands, and your heart as plucky as a giant’s! Heavens! What wouldn’t a man do for you! Why, you’ve made a new man of me already!”

He jumped up and stood in front of me, his hands in his pockets, looking all of a sudden like the Patrick of old.

“What on earth have I been grizzling about? Every man gets knocked over sometime. But at any rate I’ve got a dime in my pocket!”

“ And that’s all you want to make you a millionaire ! ” I cried, with a reckless optimism, remembering Arnold Holt’s speech.

“ I don’t believe there’s another woman in the world who’s capable of saying such a thing as that ! ”

“ It’s second-hand,” I told him, laughingly. “ I got it direct from a millionaire’s lips.”

“ Teresa ! ”

“ Yes ? ”

“ I could get work if I went out to Australia. I’ve had it offered to me there. Holder, in New South Wales, who used to be on our Norfolk farm, has written to me to come out and join him.”

“ *Australia* ! Oh, no, no ! You could never go and leave me all alone ! I couldn’t bear that ! ”

Again his arms came round me, and I was nestling there as though it were my rightful place, feeling the strong heartbeats under my cheek, and caring absolutely nothing for anything else in the world.

“ What will the end of it all be ? Do you mean that you will marry me ? ”

“ Of course I do ! ”

“ And face a long, tough struggle ? ”

“ I’d love it ! ”

“ But your father would never consent.”

“ I didn’t interfere with my father’s marriage, and I don’t see why he should interfere with mine. My father is good and righteous, but you—well, you’re the man whom I want to spend my life with. You’ve got to be first with me. You are first. For you I’d sacrifice everything and every one on earth.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because you’re worth it ! ”

“ It doesn’t look like it now ! I’m out of work, I’m almost penniless—— ! ”



“You poor darling! And I expect you’re hungry too!” I said with disconcerting literalness.

I drew myself away, and turned to a sideboard across the room, where my eyes on entering had discerned a neat little tray set with sandwiches, whisky, claret, glasses, and syphons, presumably for Arnold Holt’s midnight delectation.

I put the tray on a little table, and placed it in front of the sofa, and there we sat side by side.

“That’s the first food that’s passed my lips all day,” he said, and I came back to the present with a start. “My sister Nippy telegraphed to me that she was passing through Paris. She had quarrelled with her husband, and was leaving him, and I had a hard job to patch it up. That’s what kept me away from the hotel all day. Then when I got back at night there was old Arcot with a face like a lemon and my wages in his hand. ‘Out you go!’” he said.

“Well, never mind about that now,” I said hastily, wondering what he would think if he knew that he had been suspected of stealing Oscar’s pocket-book, and that I had recklessly taken the charge on my own shoulders, not because I believed he had done it, but because I was certain that Oscar had taken the book away with him and had hidden it somewhere himself.

Then a gentle hand tapped at the door, and next minute Aunt Anna and Mr. Holt came in.

“It’s getting late, dear,” said Aunt Anna deprecatingly. “I wouldn’t hurry you for the world, but I thought perhaps—perhaps you might have forgotten the time.”

“We’d forgotten everything!” I said.

I looked at Mr. Holt, and thought how kind and strong he looked, and in my infatuation I saw a likeness in him to Patrick, telling myself that they were

both men with iron wills, "and courage never to submit or yield."

"We've eaten all your sandwiches!" I told him happily.

"That's stunning!" he said.

Then I went to Aunt Anna and put my hand on her arm.

"Aunt Anna, don't be fearfully shocked," I said, "but I've just promised to marry Mr. Hall!"

"Really, my dear? How—how beautiful!"

Between laughing and crying I threw my arms around her, and looked over my shoulder at Arnold Holt.

"Was there ever such a darling?" I asked him incoherently.

Then I looked past him, and over his shoulder I saw, standing in the doorway, *Papa*.

## CHAPTER XLV

### ENTER PAPA

AND now the dancing firelight in Mr. Holt's library was falling on a strangely assorted group—Aunt Anna and I resplendent in our evening gowns, she in pale heliotrope veiled with black, with diamonds trembling at her ears and in her corsage, I in soft pink satin with my neck and arms bare, Arnold Holt looking very large and distinguished in his immaculate black dress-suit with a white carnation in his button-hole, Patrick in his old and distinctly shabby grey suit, his young face pale and harassed, last of all Papa in a heavy fur-lined overcoat with a white muffler round his throat, just as he had dropped in upon us from the skies, as it were.

“That any daughter of mine could act as you have done, Teresa, is the bitterest cross that has ever fallen on my shoulders,” Papa was saying fiercely. “But you *are* my daughter, and I insist upon your obedience. You must come back home with me at once, and you too, Anna. You, Teresa, have proved beyond all doubt that you're not to be trusted. Mr. Grace has told me the truth. To think that you, my own child, should have pawned your grandmother's jewels to raise bail for this graceless, wretched scamp!”

“Mr. Grace is an interfering and mean old creature!” I mumbled angrily.

Of all times in the world and all places this was

the one I would least have chosen for letting Patrick know that it was I who had found that £200 for bail.

But Patrick was turning to me sharply.

“Is that true, Teresa? Was it you who gave that surety?”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

Recklessly I went close to him and laid my hand on his arm.

But he dropped his arm and my hand too, and a little cold feeling swept over me that was half dismay and half wonder as to what was going to happen next.

“Teresa!” stormed Papa, “are you so callous as not to realise how you are dragging your family down by your persistent encouragement of this young scoundrel?”

“I am no more a scoundrel than you are!” said Patrick quietly.

And I burst in hotly:

“Papa, you are my father, but I am very sorry to think that you should allow yourself to speak like that of the man *I love and intend to marry!*”

“So it’s true, then!” said Papa. “Oscar was right. I scarcely credited him when he wired me that you had broken off your engagement to him, and—but look! Read for yourself!”

I tossed Oscar’s telegram contemptuously in the fire.

“I wish Oscar were there too!” I muttered savagely.

“James!” cried Aunt Anna piercingly, “if you come between these two young people, you’ll be doing a very wrong and unforgiveable thing! They love each other. They’re both young. All they want is a chance!”

She threw a pretty, beseeching look at her big American, and he came forward promptly.

“Yes, why not give the young man a chance, sir?” he said genially. “I’ve a farm in Canada that I want some one to look after, and I understand that you, sir”—addressing himself to Patrick—“are acquainted with farming. Well, if you like to take up my little place over there, I’m mighty proud and happy to have you, sir.”

“Thank you,” answered Patrick simply.

He was strangely pale—livid almost. His very lips were pale, and there was an expression in his eyes that betrayed to me how agitatedly his mind was working.

Then I felt rather than saw that he had come to a conclusion.

And I became more and more frightened, especially when I saw him look at Papa.

“Please don’t take any notice of what my father says!”

I addressed myself to him.

I threw into my voice all the scorn I was capable of manifesting against my parent, but Patrick ignored me and looked over my head at Papa.

“Mr. Martindale,” he said, “I have come to the conclusion that you’re quite right in what you’re saying about me and your daughter. I’m a dog with a bad name. I’m down on my luck. I’ve only a few shillings in the world. Before I can think of letting Teresa share my fortunes, I’ve got to have fortunes to share. Well, you can set your mind at ease, sir. I’ve got a friend in Australia who used to be manager of my father’s farm in Norfolk. He’s doing well in New South Wales, and he’s written to me several times, urging me to come out. Well, I shall go! Canada’s too near home. It’s very kind of Mr. Holt to make me that generous offer, but I feel I don’t want any generosity. I want to do things on my own. I

shall see at once about getting a passage out to Australia!"

"*Patrick!*"

With a sharp cry I ran to him.

Disregarding everybody, I put my hands up on his shoulders, and tried to make him look at me.

But he kept his eyes away.

"I am right," he said. "I'll take myself off the scene."

"And what of *me*?" I cried passionately. "How am I going to live without you?"

"Perhaps you'll forget me."

"I'll *never* forget you!"

We seemed to be just whispering to each other as if alone on the edge of a great, unknown sea.

"I shall love you till I drop dead! Oh, don't go! Don't leave me!"

"I must!"

"It will kill me!"

"Hush! Don't. You must be free, Teresa. It's unfair to try and keep you bound to me. I must have been blind not to see it like that before."

"I refuse to be free. I love you! Oh, what does it matter what those people say! Only don't go away. It will kill me if you do. Do you hear? It will *kill* me. Anything but going away!"

I clung to the lappels of his coat.

White face looked into white face.

For all I knew or cared the others might have entirely ceased to exist.

But he took my hands, he kissed them, he let them go.

"God bless you! God keep you! I *must* go. I see now it's the only fair thing. Perhaps I'll show them that a man who's had bad luck at the beginning can

be all the more triumphant at the end. Only remember, Teresa, I leave you free—absolutely and entirely free. I love you, so I'm going to see what I can make of myself for your sake ! ”

Then a door closed and he was gone.

## CHAPTER XLVI

“ OH, WONDERFUL GARDEN ! ”

THERE was no question of our going back to England next day, for Aunt Anna developed a sharp cough and had to stay in her room, while Papa fretted and fumed, but did his best to be more sympathetic, seeing at last how I was suffering.

“ What I blame myself for,” he said, “ is that I ever asked that young man to my house. It was I who introduced you to him. It is I who am to blame.”

“ There is no one to blame, Papa,” I said ; “ it will all come right in the end.”

“ Yes, I don’t suppose you’ll ever see him again,” he said reflectively. “ After all, Australia is at the end of the world, and he’ll probably never return. Thank Heaven he had the decency to take himself as far away as possible.”

I stared at him speechlessly, dumb before his words.

“ And to-morrow, if Aunt Anna is better, we shall all go back nicely and comfortably to England, and in time, my dear Teresa, I am sure we shall all do our best to let this very unpleasant affair blow over, and assign itself to the realms of oblivion. And in the meantime I’ve been thinking the matter over ”—he blew his nose hard several times, which I knew for a sign that he intended to be magnanimous—“ in the meantime we’ll make no further references to the matter, and you shall come home and be happy again with your



sisters, and I shall behave as though nothing had happened. Now, my dear Teresa, you can't say I'm not generous.”

“I'm sure you mean to be kind, Papa,” I said.

“My child, I do, indeed !”

He came and put his arm about me with an unexpected tenderness.

“Remember you're my daughter, and your welfare is very dear to my heart,” and there was a tremor in his voice. And as I looked up, startled, I actually saw something I had never expected to see in my life—tears in his eyes.

I felt touched, and I murmured “Dear Papa !” and I kissed him.

But the moment I was alone everything faded except that one overwhelming thought—that my love was leaving me, going to the very furthest edge of the world, that months and years must pass before we looked into each other's eyes again, and how was I to endure the hunger for his arms and voice, that would surely, surely intensify as time went on, instead of growing less.

Thirty days before my letter would reach him !

Sixty days before I could get a reply !

It was awful. Could nobody realise how awful it was ? Could nobody understand that while they were all congratulating themselves on the nice, easy, smooth way the matter had arranged itself, I was eating my heart out in an ever-growing despair ?

A girl's heart ! Is it not like an afternoon service in a church ? There are stained windows through which the golden light comes with a softened radiance ; an altar where flowers gleam whitely ; a drowsiness, a vagueness in the atmosphere ; gay hats and bonnets in the pews ; faces with dinner written over them ; a

hurried service with the soul left out of it ; something holy, something gaudy, a pathetic incongruity.

A girl's heart ! Surely the strangest, most delicate bit of mechanism that ever the Potter's cunning thumb achieved. At twenty-one we are at our loneliest. We want everything, we get nothing. We do not understand that no one can have everything, that we must learn to ask only for what we cannot do without, and to be satisfied before we get it.

We are like the early gods swallowing their children whole. We want to get all the world and the stars down our throats, and feel everything within us. We crave to surround chaos, and yet are afraid to get one little morsel in our teeth.

Once in the night I got up and crept into Aunt Anna's room, to find the dear old thing sitting reading placidly by her fire, wrapped in a warm pink shawl.

" Oh, Auntie, Auntie ! " I said, going down on my knees beside her and burying my face in her lap. " I can't bear it—really I can't. If he goes away, it will kill me ! "

" I know, my dear, I know. "

" But, Aunt Anna, *really* it will kill me ! You think it's only talk. You think I can stand it, that I'll get over it, that I'll bear it because I've got to. But I can't, Aunt Anna—I can't ! . . . It's something outside myself. " My voice cracked and broke, and my tears ran into the pink shawl, that absorbed them tenderly, gently, without any fuss.

" Poor little girl ! "

" Can't anything be done, Aunt Anna ? "

" My dear, you know if there's anything I can do I'll only be too glad to do it. In fact, if I had my way, I'd pack you off with him and let you both sink or swim together ! " Her voice over my head sounded

fierce—fierce enough to satisfy even my passionate heart.

“How you understand, Auntie!” I said presently.

“When we grow old and look back along the years, we’re able to see clearly enough the country we have travelled.” Her voice grew gentler. Her hand rested caressingly on my head.

Then presently she began to speak in a low, half-unconscious voice, as if more to herself than to any one else.

“The fields of childhood are full of birds and flowers, Teresa, dear. We pick the flowers and throw them away. If we can, we catch the birds, and squeeze them passionately in our chubby fingers.

“Then come the little hills, where we learn to climb, and jump and fall down and get up again. And then the big road.

“Out we come into the big road, our eyes full of wonder, full of simple memories of birds and flowers, and little falls and little uprisings. Out into the big road, along by the shadow of the big trees. The flowers are fewer. The birds are farther off. But they tell us of a great Garden. The air is full of this great Garden. The poets whisper about it, music hints of it, our heart cries for it. The Bible promises it. Where is it? Shall we reach it soon? On, on, along the road. Where, then, is the Garden? The heart smiles with vague joy—swells with vague disappointment. Where is the Garden?

“On, on, along the road. Beautiful visions of what the Garden will be like steal along with us. Oh, if we could only be worthy to walk in the Garden! And what must the flowers be there—oh, wonderful Garden, ever coming nearer. But when shall we reach it? On, on, farther along the road. The visions of the

Garden come and go, and the scent of the flowers blows our way. Sometimes, at sunrise, we think we hear the birds singing ; sometimes, at sunset, we think we must be nearly there. Oh, wonderful Garden ! When shall we reach you ?

“ On, on, along the road. And suddenly the road opens into a great, flat field, vast, interminable. Or it runs up to a city, and disappears in a tangle of streets. We enter the field or the city. Where is our Garden ? But we can see now there is no Garden here, in this flat, interminable plain, or in this crowded, hurrying city. No ; we have left the Garden behind ; we were passing it all the time. Perhaps we were as near as any one ever gets, all the time we were crying : ‘ When shall we come to our Garden ? ’

“ But something is left to us. We have the knowledge now that will help those millions of others coming so anxiously along the road. Let us go back to them and tell them :

“ ‘ There is no more Garden than that. You are as near now as you ever will be. There is only one time to be happy ; that time is *always*. ’

“ Something is left to us. Let us make some one who is young still believe, beyond all doubt, that her youth is beautiful, so that when she is old she can look back on it without regret for having blindly passed the fairy groves that were so lovely, so simple, so satisfying, had she only known.”

Her voice died away, and I rested there, comforted and soothed by the knowledge that Aunt Anna herself must have been through something very like what I was going through now.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### DANCING HEART

HE wrote me that he was sailing steerage on the "Oronto" that left Marseilles on Friday.

On the afternoon of the day on which I got his letter I wandered down to the Orient Company's offices.

I was half crazy, I think.

"What time does the 'Oronto' start from Marseilles?" I asked the young man across the counter. "And what train should one leave Paris by to catch that boat?"

The clerk courteously gave me all information in his power, and when I had nothing else to ask him I still lingered and began to study the sectional plan of the vessel that lay open on the counter.

Just then a middle-aged lady, handsomely dressed in rich furs, drove up in a motor.

"I've come to cancel a berth on the 'Oronto,'" she said. "It's very annoying, and I hope I'm not too late to give up the berth. If so, of course I shall have to abide by it. But I've just heard that the English governess I was taking out with me to Australia has contracted measles and is totally unable to travel. Of course, I'm sorry for her, poor Miss Bundleham, but it's frightfully trying for me, isn't it? I'll have my two little girls on my hands all the voyage. It's quite impossible to get a decent governess at a moment's notice to go to an out-of-the-way place like Australia. I'm very

upset ! For it's very difficult to find thorough governesses out there."

She had a charming, friendly manner, grey eyes, grey hair, and a look of deep womanliness.

Without one moment's hesitation I yielded to the wild idea that had seized me.

"Pardon me ! If you want a governess to go to Australia," I said, stepping close to her and doing my best to repress my eagerness, "I wonder if *I* would suit ? "

"My dear, you're very young !" she exclaimed. "Have you had any experience ? "

"I can teach German, French, Italian, music, drawing, painting, kindergarten ; I play hockey, tennis, croquet, golf. I can sew and play accompaniments, and play bridge, and make blouses, and I'm awfully good with children—I can tell them fairy-tales and amuse them and keep them quiet when nobody else can. I've never been out as governess, but I've had a good many brothers and sisters, and I've had a lot of experience at home."

"Exactly what I want ! Of course you would have references ? "

"If you would come to the Hôtel Blanc you could see my Aunt, Miss Anna St. Dunstan, and she would tell you all about me."

Mrs. O'Mara took out her watch.

"Very well, then. I've just time. Let's go there straight away," she said amiably, and there and then she drove me in her own car to the Hôtel Blanc, and an interview took place between her and Aunt Anna, which proved entirely satisfactory to the three of us.

While Mrs. O'Mara was writing addresses at Auntie's desk (for Aunt Anna with all her unworldliness had not overlooked the importance of finding out all about

Mrs. O'Mara, and learning that her references included the Colonial Office) Aunt Anna whispered to me :

"Your father has been summoned back to England on important business while you were out ! A crisis occurred in the shipping strike, and his presence in London was indispensable."

I danced round the room with delight when we were alone.

How strange it was !

I was perhaps going far, far from home ; I was leaving mother, father, brothers, sisters ; I was breaking all the old, sweet links that, however they galled and chafed at times, had been after all the natural bonds of my girlhood. All that filled me with inevitable sadness. And yet never the slightest shadow of regret crossed my heart for the adventurous affair that I was about to embark upon.

"If I were not going, I should be *dying* !" I told Aunt Anna, as I started pulling out my things preparatory to packing.

For it is true of some people, that they pine and wither when separated from those they love ; life ceases to flow through their veins ; the sunlight vanishes ; the birds' songs fail ; the pulse grows slower and heavier, and an atrophy that is simply a slow approach to death closes down on them.

"But what about *you*, Aunt Anna ? " I said, struck with sudden compunction for all the trouble I was causing her.

Aunt Anna reddened.

"My dear," she said, with a shy little laugh, "I'm going to put it all on to a pair of stronger shoulders than my own ! Arnold has persuaded me to forget the wasted years. We're to be married immediately and go yachting in the Ionian Sea, far, far out of poor

dear James's reach ! It's naughty of me, I know. But life is life. And Arnold agrees with me that you and Patrick are both quite capable of working out your own destiny."

" God bless all Americans ! " I carolled gaily.



## CHAPTER XLVIII

“ I GUESS SHE’S PROVED HER CASE ! ”

IT was the afternoon of the day before I sailed, and my light-heartedness, far from disappearing, had increased as time went on, until to-day I was so buoyant, so hilarious, that I felt as if a touch, a breath, would send me fluttering and dancing round the universe. A more complete metamorphosis could not be imagined than that which had taken place in my spirits. I was all hope, all gladness. Leaving Europe behind me, and following my love to the world’s end, seemed like some gay, delightful adventure, without hardships, without drawbacks—a wonderful adventure full of magic and enchantment—and I faced it as freely as a bird faces the wind and sunshine of a summer’s day.

In truth, I saw little of the voyage, little of the facts and circumstances relating thereto, for my vision was focused upon one blinding goal ; it took no heed of anything but Patrick.

Even the country I was going to had no meaning for me whatever, except that it was the country he was going to also.

At this time I verily believe that no power on earth except death could have restrained me.

A superhuman force kept driving me through the hours, lending me a bright, sharp energy that made me shop with smiling lips and kept afar from me any such

physical absurdities as tiredness and wanting to sleep. Just an hour or two in the dawn seemed enough to refresh me for the whole day. Then I was up again and at it, packing, planning, arranging, and growing happier every second.

In the twilight of this particular day I sat down for a moment with Aunt Anna—not to rest, but to keep her company over a cup of tea.

“So to-morrow you really are going!” she said, her fragile hands taking a tea-cup from me with a slight quivering movement that made the china jangle sweetly, as though it loved to be touched by those fragile, quivering fingers—those fingers that were as an index to her fragile, quivering soul.

“Muffins, darling?” I asked, with a bubble in my voice. “Real English muffins, Auntie! They got them expressly for us.”

“No thank you, dear! I—I’ll just drink some tea.”

“Now, Auntie, you’re not to go off your feed!” I looked at her reproachfully, and a little uneasily too, for to-day she looked like a mere silhouette of a woman, all fineness and ethereal suggestion—so much more spirit than flesh that I felt a little frightened. “What will Mr. Holt say if you present him with a wilting bride?”

“Mr. Holt will refuse to accept her!” said a voice behind us.

We both started.

A large man, in loose, grey clothes, with brown boots and a big felt hat in his hand, was the speaker.

Arnold Holt, declaring he had knocked several times, was standing at the doorway, looking at us, and never did the man’s personality strike me so happily as at that moment when I glanced at him over Auntie’s

shoulder, and saw him like some splendid shield held aloft between her and life's trials.

"Come and have some tea!" I cried, and taking his hat from him and his stick I made him sit down in the most probable chair for a man of his weight and build.

"Why, now a whisky-and-soda would be more in my line! I've been busy to-day—very busy."

"Been buying the earth?" I asked happily, ordering the whisky-and-soda for him promptly.

"A good part of it," he answered smilingly. "And you, young lady, what tricks have you been up to? And how is it you're looking like a piece of Dresden china in the sunlight? Aren't you frightened yet at this madcap undertaking of yours?"

"Frightened!" I laughed. "Do I *look* frightened?" Perkily I put my head on one side and twinkled at myself in the mirror. Nodding at my reflection, I showed my teeth and answered the question myself. "No, I don't look frightened. I look what I am—as happy as a bee!"

"Well, you're a conundrum," said Arnold Holt.

"No, I'm a woman," said I.

"A woman! Bless the child! Well, are you still in the same mind about Australia? You've not backed out of it yet?"

He looked at Aunt Anna for a moment, and then forgot to look back at me.

His eyes suddenly took on an almost incredible gentleness, and leaning forward he let his gaze rest for a long moment on that delicate, faded face. I, watching, experienced a strange sensation. It was as though some hypnotic influence was creeping from Arnold Holt's eyes, creeping into Aunt Anna's blood, into her skin, her hair, her lips, her eyes, her whole physical being, until right under my very gaze the faded

woman disappeared, and a face of great beauty, and charm, with a pale-rose flush on its delicate cheeks, came in its stead.

And not imagination was this !

Years before, when I was quite a tiny pigtailed girl, something similar, something of an equal magic and beauty, had unfolded itself before my eyes.

Berta, our cousin, had had a baby, and I was one of the first to see it.

On tip-toe, fearfully, my heart beating fast, I was taken into the room where the little, red, lobster-like creature lay, wrapped in white flannels on its Nurse's capacious lap, and Nurse with a comfortable fat hand moved back a corner of the flannel and said to me : " Look at that ! " And I looked, and no words can tell the horror and dismay that swept over me. *That* Berta's baby ! That little, red, hideous, wretched-looking bit of red, crinkled flesh ! That, cousin Berta's baby ! I saw two toothless gums working violently ; a shapeless mass of scarlet matter was heaving up and down ; there were a couple of slits where eyes were supposed to be ; but as far as I could see there was no hair and there were no features ; there was nothing but a little red mass of shapeless pulp.

My horror was so intense that I stood quite speechless, staring at it.

The one thought that came into my mind was, " Oh, poor Berta, poor Berta ! Think of cousin Berta having such a horror as that for a baby ! "

For in my mind's eye I had pictured exactly the kind of baby Berta was going to have.

In fact, Berta had told me herself what it was going to be like.

Golden hair, she had said, with little dancing curls all over its head.

And blue-eyed.

Ah, but eyes like the angel’s, with their blue washed in by the skies !

Such a sunny, dancing, gleaming little thing—a baby’s face that

“ Takes a graver grace  
Touched with wonder from some other place.”

A doll, in fact, pink and white, with sky-blue eyes, a little red mouth, and gleaming curls was what I had confidently expected to be shown by that fat, comfortable Nurse when she raised a corner of the white flannel.

Never as long as I live shall I forget my wretchedness as I went home that day, haunted by the thought of that crumpled, scarlet monstrosity. Pity for Berta was my predominant emotion. My pity, in fact, took away my appetite. I remember perfectly that I could eat no dinner that night. So profound was my distress that I tried to keep matters secret for Berta’s sake, and when Mama asked me what the baby was like, and added confidently, “ That little thing’ll be a great comfort to Berta ! ” it was all I could do to keep from bursting into tears. Instead, out of sheer loyalty to my lively cousin, I crept to bed to avoid questioning, and spent a sleepless night, thinking of the awful thing that had happened to our pretty, merry Berta.

Next day I was depressed and gloomy.

*Next* day I went over again to see how Berta was getting on.

I was taken into Berta’s bedroom this time, and there I saw my cousin lying pale and smiling among her laces.

At first I was frightened to look. So idiotic was I, that I expected her to burst into tears and cry, “ Oh,

isn't it *awful* that I should have such a baby as that ! And don't you pity me, Teresa ? ”

I stood awkward and miserable at the bedside, scarce daring to raise my eyes.

“ Have you seen her ? ” breathed a voice from the bed. “ Ah, here's Nurse ! Come along, Nurse ; give her to me ! ”

And in came Nurse with a bundle.

Gravely, yet smilingly, Nurse handed the bundle over to my pretty cousin, who held her arms open for it.

Then Nurse disappeared, the door was closed behind her, and Berta and I were alone—alone with *it*.

“ Isn't she sweet, Teresa ? ” breathed a faint cooing voice from the laces and pillows. “ Look ! Her two little feet go into my hand ! ”

I felt as if an electric shock had gone through me, and in my agitation I raised my head and looked first at the baby and then at Berta. Against the pillows I saw a lovely brown-haired woman with a tiny rose flush in each clear, pale cheek and two great, smiling, shining eyes of grey mirroring rapture—nothing less.

Her arms in their thin, white muslins and laces encircled a bundle, and she was looking down at this bundle with an expression that sent queer, creepy feelings all over me, for it was the expression of a woman who had her heart's desire.

And then I looked again at the baby, following Berta's gaze.

I looked and looked and looked.

“ Isn't she sweet ? ” murmured Berta.

And there, under my eyes, an incredible transformation took place.

How can one describe it ?

A moment ago there had been a shapeless little mass of crimson ugliness, so ugly and so crimson that my

heart had been fairly racked with pity for the pretty mother. Now, beneath the hypnotism of Berta’s eyes there was mysteriously emerging a tiny, dainty baby—a baby with a darling little nose, two shut pink eyes fringed with a few dark lashes and a wee red mouth.

I gazed bewildered.

What on earth had happened to the little red lobster-like monster whom I knew, beyond all argument and doubt, to have been there a moment before ?

“Isn’t she sweet ? ” said Berta. “Oh, Baby, Baby, why do you go to sleep ? ” Berta raised her eyes to mine. “She always goes to sleep ! ” she said, half-crossly, half-laughingly, and snuggled her pet against her bosom, closing her eyes and forgetting all about me for a moment, while I stood there, looking down at what had become the most exquisite picture I had ever seen in my life—a happy mother and her sweet babe.

Years ago was that.

The babe was eight years old now, and Berta had been settled in Canada for the last seven years, but the whole scene rose before me now as vividly as though it were yesterday.

For again I was watching the hypnotism of love, and it was just as inexplicable to me to-day as it had been then and just as great a physical phenomenon—a phenomenon physical and psychic that made one realise the silliness and futility of thinking that anything on earth must be just so because one expects it to be just so.

I looked up dreamily, waking from my long reverie, and found Arnold Holt regarding me now instead of Aunt Anna.

“Well, finished dreaming of him ? ” he asked quizzically, a laugh in his eyes.

But there was something beside a laugh too.

A deep, momentous gravity it was, as I was presently to realise.

“Still decided to go, then?” he went on quietly. Leaning back in his chair, he put his finger-tips together, set his mouth in a straight line, and drew the upper and lower lids of his eyes almost together, just leaving space for bits of grey to glint through. “Ain’t you frightened of the cannibals?”

“I’m frightened of nothing!” I told him gaily.

“Got your things ready?”

“Yes.”

“Got everything you want in a savage country?”

“Yes.”

“Got a revolver?”

“Shan’t need one!” I said, with assurance, taking his teasing in quite good part.

He sat up suddenly.

“But come now, Teresa, let’s be serious. What do you know about this country you’re going to? Suppose I put you through an examination? What’s the capital of New South Wales, for instance?”

“Victoria!” I answered gravely.

But he was too cute to be caught by my trickery.

“You know *that* right enough!” he said, “because your boat lands you there. But what do you know about the manners and customs of the people, the climate, the clothes, the foods? Seems to me you’re taking a mighty long journey and a mighty big risk too! And, then, you see, when you get out there, suppose the young fellow goes off droving?—suppose he gets out into the wilds of the Never-Never and drifts upwards towards the Gulf of Carpentaria, where they’ll turn him jolly quick into a ‘bushee’—a bushee so wild and unkempt that you’ll shriek when



you catch sight of him ? Ain’t you frightened of that sort of thing, my girl ? ”

“ No ! ”

I felt cross, for I thought he was carrying his teasing a little too far, and I jumped up and made for the door, muttering something about packing, but before I could turn the handle, Arnold Holt had sprung to his feet, and was after me. He took me by the shoulders. He turned me round. He seemed to want the light in my face. Then he stood looking down at me, and I saw that his dancing eyes were very grave and kindly. Lifting one hand, he laid it gently on my head, and tenderly, caressingly, he stroked back my hair, while I stood dead still, and thought what a darling he was, and how Aunt Anna must care for him, for his touch seemed to tell one somehow what the heart was like under that big, strong frame.

“ Teresa, you’re a brave soul ! You’re a splendid little girl. Now listen, dear. To-morrow afternoon you sail for Australia, but you don’t sail alone, child ! Your Aunt and I are coming too ! ”

I stood and looked up at him stupidly.

“ What do you mean ? ” I said, at last.

He drew me nearer, and, bending, kissed my forehead, and then patted my head again.

Then he let me go, and went over to Aunt Anna, and leaned over the back of her chair.

“ You tell her, my dear,” he said.

“ No—you tell her, Arnold ! ” said she.

I looked from one to the other.

“ Very well, then, I’ll tell you,” said the big American. “ Your Aunt and I are going to be married to-morrow morning. We’re coming out to Australia for our wedding trip. We’re coming along in the boat with

you. Why not? You don't object, do you? It ain't likely, child, we're going to let you set off for the end of the world with some people you don't know from a bar of soap, while we sit still over here and look on at your struggles. No, sir! We're coming along with you! Our passages are booked, and it's all fixed up."

He paused, looking at me with a glance so full of melting kindness and sympathy that my heart gave a loud throb, and I had the feeling of seeing a stone being rolled away off Patrick's back.

"I've been just watching to see how far you'd both go, you two young folk," Arnold Holt was going on gravely. "I wanted to test you. I wanted to find out just exactly what you both meant to each other before I butted in. Well, now I've found out. There's no doubt left in my mind but that you and that young fellow are made for each other. A girl who acts as you've done, and shows herself not only willing, but delighted, to follow her lover to the ends of the earth just to be near him—a girl who proposes to go and earn her own living in a strange country just so she can be on the same continent as the man she loves—why, I guess she's proved her case, that girl!"

I buried my face in my hands.

What he was saying to me was overwhelming me in a curious way, letting a warm sluice tide rush through my heart—a tide that washed away everything but that love of which he was speaking.

What did it mean, that love? And why were these things that Arnold Holt was saying about me true? Why was I ready to go to the world's end for this man of whom, after all, I knew so little? Why did going to the world's end represent a wild delight since he would be there too, while staying behind

among all the conveniences and luxuries of the Old World was a symbol of horror, of decay, of death ? Yes, life without him was death, and that was the truth of it, and life where he was was gladness and health, and sanity, and laughter, and tears, and everything that goes to make up the beauty and value of one’s journey towards Eternity—the little fleeting, mysterious journey, so brief yet so difficult except when the Star of Love lights up its winding by-ways.

And how strange that I, Teresa, so ordinary and commonplace in myself, should have been seized upon by this great passion ! Who would have expected it of me ? I, least of all in the world, would have supposed that my destiny was to be eaten out and in with a frantic unreasoning and heedless devotion to a headstrong, baffling man against whom Fate appeared to have a pretty malicious grudge—if being knocked over an inordinate number of times means malice—though indeed I doubted it. In my opinion a man was “ baffled to fight better,” and I looked on all Patrick’s bad luck as simply so much good luck in disguise. Always I felt in my marrow bones—felt it beyond all doubt—that what Fate had been doing with Patrick was simply giving him a chance to find out how much he could bear.

Lifting my burning face at last, I looked up at the dear big American, who was watching me across the room.

I got up and went towards him, and without a word I threw myself into his arms.

At that moment he and Patrick seemed to have merged identities, and Arnold Holt was Patrick and Patrick was Arnold Holt.

And Arnold Holt had a big soul, and he understood.

I knew he understood by the way he said, “ God

bless you, dear child ! God bless you ! ” -looking over my head at Aunt Anna.

“ But what about Mrs. O’Mara ? ” I asked presently, stricken with dismay at the way I was leaving that dear, kind lady in the lurch.

“ I’ve fixed that up,” said Arnold Holt, imperturbably. “ Time being short, I made the most of it. I found an excellent young lady from my own country, who is only too glad to take your place.”

At which I nearly—no, *quite* !—flung myself into his arms again.

## CHAPTER XLIX

### THE BEGINNING OF A LONG, LONG JOURNEY

It was evening—nearly seven.

Time being short, we had decided to give ourselves a few hours longer, and catch our boat from Naples instead of Marseilles.

Orchards and orchards went flying past us, and quaint houses among willows—dear, sweet, little houses, buried deep in vines. This country cried, “Come back, come back!” I said, “I will!” For I loved it for its thrift, its cleanliness, its gaiety.

To-day I had seen the red sun rise over Paris. The day after to-morrow I might watch a pink-and-opal dawn break over Capri and Naples. Now I saw Sol give his last kiss to little gay France, clad brightly in spring green, and I saw her blush an exquisite light blush, fit for a happy bride.

And I thought, “How happy I am! How lucky!”

Along the night came a half arc of light, flaming away miles off—a vivid, flaring arc, the lights of Monte Carlo!

Our train stopped. High up to the left ran white steps steeply. Peering upwards, we caught gleams of marble in gardens above, and beyond, higher still, a great burst of light from the palace itself.

People came tearing down the steps. Many of them had little bags in their hands. They flew along and hastened into our train, which was soon crowded.

Lovely young girls in evening dress and opera wraps, hideous old women, bad old men, faded young men, fast faces, sad faces, mad faces, and many bad faces, all terribly animated, or terribly inanimate.

Our train was full of noise and bustle. It was a corridor train with a long passage going alongside the little compartments. All night long people were walking up and down. Men were smoking, women laughing, bursts of song and talk and laughter went on without stopping. At some of the stations passengers left us. Towards dawn every one grew quieter.

At midnight we came to Ventimiglia, and that was the end of France.

The change into Italy held me captive. It astonished me. Almost in a moment the whole complexion of things changed. The gloomy, dirty Italian railway-stations, with their slow, dawdling porters, absence of hurry, and unbusinesslike ways, succeeded the bright, clean, gleaming stations, with their spruce officials hurrying to and fro, and crisp language in the air, their suggestion of responsibility understood and accepted, that had been so noticeable in France. Everything there was so quick and gay and clean. The atmosphere, though heavy with sweet flowers, had none of this odour of decay.

On, on we went through the night. We could hear the sea lapping on beaches through the dark. Around us lay the Italian Riviera. The breaths of millions of flowers were in the air, sweet, heavy, deadening scents. Lilies and roses, tube-roses and orange-blossoms, swept through the night. It was too dark to see, but we seemed to be in a world of flowers at the edge of a strange sea.

Aunt Anna, in her corner opposite me, was drooping sleepily, and soon I saw she had fallen into a doze.

Then the gentle crooning of the waves cast some hypnotic spell over me, and as the train flew onward I was conscious of a vague, fantastic unconsciousness, that dissolved itself into sleep.

At dawn a purply mist swathed great Genoa and her lengthened outskirts. Those great, straight houses, with many, many windows and little, narrow, roofless balconies running up, up, up, were like some stage scene to me. But an air of squalor, of decay, hovered over the place. Immense houses and old palaces were shamelessly stained with damp and dirt. It spread over their sides in great, brown festers.

Sa Marghareta, Rapallo, Levante, Monterosso, Spezia, all with their faces to the Mediterranean. And sun and rain, and a sparkling world of sea on one side and green land on the other. Then sun, and a clear sky of azure.

A sky more blue than ours, even though rain-deepened, but not the great, ineffable fire of turquoise that will shine over Australia half the year round.

Many a place called to me as we passed, "Come back, come back!" I flew on with a pang. I would have liked to linger with some of these haunting spots. But we passed on.

Those were the quickest friendships I had ever made. Only a minute's glimpse, yet I remembered their faces and knew I wanted them again. They all had definite places in my heart and brain, though I could not call them all by name.

Still the hours went on. We were flying through lovely places. It was raining a little, but there were pale bursts of sun. There began an endless succession of tunnels. An Englishman in the far corner came out as a hero. He sat at the window and slashed it up and down until I grew positively dizzy with count-

ing. I wondered his arm did not crack. Up and down, up and down. No sooner had he opened it than we were in another tunnel, and up it came again. Why did he not leave it down? Why did he not leave it up? Why did he work us all up to a state of nervous frenzy, unable to resist watching his operations? His face wore an expression of mild determination mixed with stupidity. I thought: Is he indifferent to our scorn? Or is he impenetrable? Yes, he is impenetrable. There was only room for one idea at a time in his John Bull head, and the idea was at present to open and shut that window. How he grappled with the tunnels! He had been here before. But sometimes he miscalculated, and the tunnel would roar upon him while the window was still down, and we would hear him slashing through the dark, with the leather strap in his hand. And sometimes the tunnels followed each other in almost breathless succession, one after the other, and the window would then be in such a condition of darting up only to be flung down, that a white despair settled in a mist of tears over its panes, and it gave up all hope of ever again finding out whether it was open or shut that day.

What a strange day for me! Out of the windows went flying by Italy—Italy, mountains, fields, castles, villages, cities, and all day long on our right lay the Mediterranean, not a shimmering field of gay, wide blue, but a leaden sea, tossing greyly against the land. It was so close sometimes that we could throw a stone into it from our train.

Rain fell. Sometimes we slept and sometimes we watched, and the strange day went on.

Our compartment had long since formed itself into a family party. What an intimacy is established be-



tween half-a-dozen people travelling all day in a railway-carriage when Stiffness does not happen to be an intruder! How keen the interest in each other! How closely scanned are the faces around, until something of their lives is discovered by the searching eyes that read them! Soon everybody knew we were going to Australia. An Englishwoman in a tam-o'-shanter and a thin nose made rather a droll remark.

"Whenever I used to see an animal in the Zoo with 'Australia' on its cage, I always thought, 'What a long way you have come from!'"

The other passengers in the carriage were three—on old Italian gentleman and his old brown wife, in a brown dress, and thick woolly brown gloves, and a young Frenchman. The latter jumped in just as the train was starting. He was in a startling state of newness and smartness, the most dapper little man that ever hurried to catch a train, and fell over my feet in the catching of it! He was so funny, so droll, so small, and compact, and finished, and fierce, with his black moustaches waxed like two black lucifers on either side of his little, stiff, white nose, with his small feet encased in frightfully shiny, little boots of patent leather, with his thin legs in the tightest of striped grey trousers, belonging to an equally well-fitting, short, grey coat, so unlike anything I had ever seen before that I could not keep my eyes off him. Presently, through staring so hard, I capsized my basket, which knocked over my bag; my money rolled out. Some of it went behind the seat, some fell on the floor. Arnold Holt and I tried to gather it together, but we found we must raise the seat before we could reach the coins between the seat and the back of the carriage. We had to ask the

Italian gentleman to get up. He did so as if we were conferring the largest fortune on him he had ever received, and proceeded to help us lift the long velvet cushion.

Suddenly, up jumped the little Frenchman and hurriedly joined in the search. He went down on his knees, and dived into the shady corners that lurk beneath the seats in railway-carriages, and presently he came up with several coins in his grasp, and with two very dusty little hands. To us the dust on them was only dust. To him it seemed a tragedy, without the climax of the last act—without any last act, in fact. He seated himself, when all the money was restored to me, and sadly held out his hands before him and looked at them. For full five minutes he stared at them. His expression was indescribable. It revealed horror, but the other emotions were unknown to us—or at any rate we could not recognise them in that guise. There he sat, gazing at those little dusty hands, as if Hell had been suddenly let loose between his fingers. It was evidently a terrible crisis to him. He seemed as if he could not rise above it. The longer he looked, the more complicated grew his expression. He seemed as if he were going to die of disgust.

By and by he jumped up and stared out of the window. I think he was trying to forget his hands. But every now and then I saw his eyes go down towards them ; then out they would go, the two offending members. The fingers were held stiffly out, and his gaze remained on them for many minutes at a time. I was like to die with suppressed laughter, and I saw a dancing smile at the corners of Arnold Holt's strong mouth.

Sometimes for a quarter of an hour he forgot. He

dozed, or looked at the scenery. Then recollection would overtake him, and out would go his hands, and over his tiny, waxed, washed, tidied countenance would steal that look of suppressed wrath and horror.

This went on for hours. We passed many haunting, adorable little old cities and villages, and still he looked at his hands. We all ate and drank at intervals. He never did. Sometimes he jumped out at one of the stations and walked quickly up and down with a furious scowl, robbed of intimidation by his dapper neatness, that never failed him except in one particular. Every time he returned his little black hat was more and more on one side.

What was he, this little man? Merely, it may be, a vivid picture of strange life offered us by the gods, who were illustrating our travels. That explanation might not satisfy him, but it is all I have to offer on my own behalf. His own translation of himself is not likely to reach me. I shall go curious to my life's end, whenever I happen to think of him, see him staring at his dirty hands with angry eyes, watch his white cheeks grow slowly redder and redder, note his eyes gaining a fierce sparkle, see him take his energetic dives out on to the platform, dash up and down in haste, with his hat on one side, for several minutes, but never take a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, and then return with a redder cheek, a crookeder hat, and a wilder eye, to resume at intervals that inspection of his hands. All these I shall see, but shall never see behind them. He was a mystery, he is a mystery, and there is nothing more to say of him than that he completed the picture.

Early next morning, before dawn broke, a green

world gleamed outside our window. My heart began to beat madly. There was surprise mixed with the wild beatings.

I had anticipated brown-and-grey ruins, and ruins, and ruins, and ruins. Here were green fields and the fire of a million scarlet poppies blazing from fields and roadsides. Except for the great grey walls I could have believed myself going from High Wycombe to Warwick. That's the first great lesson of travelling. The world is just the world. A city is just a city. Land is just land. Grass is just grass. Trees are just trees. The dream place doesn't exist, nor the dream trees, nor the dream atmosphere. Perhaps it is on account of all my dream cities that my first attitude to each new land is antagonism. They are only cities after all, and it hurts to find that out, and to find that it is a truth, and there's no getting away from it except by death.

I didn't expect to find marble emperors stalking about marble streets in purple state. But I didn't expect a railway-station and buns and coffee at *Rome* ! They seemed impossible !

I pressed my face to the window-pane, and saw the Campagna coming nearer and nearer in the pale light of early morn.

I made a few desperate efforts to adjust two sets of thoughts, one belonging to the imagined Rome, existing all these years only in the mind, and one leaping from this actual Rome. There was not so much a want of harmony between the two as a natural estrangement between two who had never met and never anticipated meeting. I tried to understand that it was to Rome we were coming, but in vain. That great, desolate field on the left of the railway-line, and away in the distance the silhouetted city,

red with dawn, was that indeed the Campagna?—was that indeed Rome?

And after Rome would come Naples. And at Naples the steamer. And on the steamer Patrick! My heart gave a suffocating leap as I stared out across the Campagna and thought how near I was getting to the time when I should be close, close to my love, encompassed in the same little floating world, even though he mightn't see me or guess at my nearness.

Aunt Anna and I had planned a lovely programme for Rome. We thought we should have only a few hours there. Tired as we were, we meant to rush to St. Peter's, see as many pictures and statues as possible, dash into the Catacombs, drive on the Appian Way. We also included hot baths and breakfasts in our plans.

It was just seven as we steamed into Rome railway-station. Tired, dirty, hungry, hot-headed, but intensely happy, we gazed about us.

"You have just ten minutes to drink a cup of coffee in and eat a bun before the train starts," said Arnold Holt practically.

Away with our dreams of hot baths and St. Peter's and the Catacombs! Arnold hurried us across the railway-lines, which we walked across primitively, as they might do in Australia, without overhead bridge or underground tunnel, and put us into another train. Then he brought a waiter, and we ordered coffee and rolls, and in a twinkling there was a big tray at the carriage door.

*O tempora! O mores!* Oh, Rome, and buns, and coffee! My memory of Rome will ever bring before me the best coffee and the most curiously enticing bun I ever [met—a little sweet, light, crisp, melting

round thing, as unlike a bun as this Rome was unlike my Other private-property Rome.

Buns, coffee, Rome ! Rome, buns, coffee ! Coffee, Rome, buns ! However you place them, they won't look right.

So I'll hasten away from them, away from Rome onward towards Australia.

## CHAPTER L

### THE CANAL

EARLY, early—one breaking, rose-flushed morning—our ship creeps into the Canal.

The Canal holds out its arms to us, and we pass through. Away in the distance stretches a white glimmer across the sapphire waves, a stiff white city lying along the edge of the waters.

Past the blue houses on the left shore, past the grey houses and the white houses; past the gay French hotel, with engrassed terrace under the trees, set out alluringly with little chairs and little tables; past vivid, gleaming lines of emerald, dashes of tenderest green, breaking along the Canal side, and stealing on our senses with the sweet, poignant charm of green trees seen for the first time after days and nights of waves and waters. And every now and then that great, inimitable, unerring artist, The East, flecks in on the picture a dart of scarlet—a red fez on some copper-coloured brow.

Vermilion—that the Impressionist swears by—here is your vermilion for you! But see how this Artist uses it; see how Nature understands its value. A dash, a flash, just enough scarlet to thrill without palling. Even as you look it has gone, leaving behind an impression as of jewels seen for a moment only, then withdrawn, which is the true romance and reason for jewels and vermilion alike.

On, on, on. Narrowing banks nearly meet in front of us. The water before us runs in like a lengthening green snake. We creep along slowly and still more slowly.

The Desert begins—vast, silent, melancholy, monotonous. It strikes us to the heart. It brings to our minds the land before us, the fair, young island-continent, glimmering away in the far Pacific. Australia rises up before us. The silence hovers over her plains ; she, too, has her melancholy, monotonous reaches. And so the Desert, the aged, wrinkled, time-worn Desert, sings to me of the young country I am going to. By the water's edge bulrushes and palm-trees call to us when an Egyptian settlement is approaching. Mud houses and flat roofs, women in dense black, veiled to the eyes, some of them, and Arabs running along the banks with us—brown creatures, copper-coloured creatures, lean-legged beings—shrieking for pennies they never get.

So green is the water at our bow, such pea-green, blue-green, salad-green, that it looks as if you could cut the colour out of it with a knife.

All day the yellow-grey Desert lies under the yellowy-grey sun. In the afternoon dim purples creep over the grey ; the sand is misted with a dull, low note of dusky plum colour. And the day dies down—dies down. Then sunset—such a sunset ! The Desert turns into a purple symphony. A purple cloud, rose washed and fantastic, hovers over a white lagoon. The dull violet deepens in the sand. A deeper amethyst creeps from the shores at the Canal's edge. The sky is a violet garden. But even as we look it throws away its violets and breaks into crimson. The lagoon turns gold and rose under the new canopy above. And the sand waves creep on and on, till they



reach the waters of the Nile. In a vast overflow the Nile has swept over its banks and washed miles across the Desert. Here, in the sunset, it lies on our right in one huge sheet of fiery water, with little islands of dark reeds and rushes creeping up blackly from its glowing waves.

Behind us comes the slow procession of stately ships, following us towards the Red Sea with a sort of haughty humility, so large and dignified that they suffer silently at the narrowness of this passage of water cut for them by a man's brain through God's earth.

Tennyson's line has its fullest meaning here, in this fading evening at the Desert's edge :

“The stately ships glide on.”

The words come to the lips as the great, silent, human-looking creatures follow one another with a dumb, inimitable grace, shooting silver searchlights over the waters, and lighting up the ships that move in front of the solemn procession.

## CHAPTER LI

### PASSENGERS

THE passengers begin to grow more clear-cut as the days go by. One by one they stand out from the heterogeneous mass of men and women, who all look so marvellously alike at first.

The doctor is a person of interest. He is a thin, old, long-legged man in navy blue, with a white moustache, a little blue cap, and a long, straight back. Twenty years he has been in the service. Can he have any illusions left? As we talk together, I scan him over carefully, looking for illusions. Indeed, he has a few still. He admires a pretty woman. He still finds children lovable little objects. He still sees the humour of life.

“How do you like Sydney, doctor?” asks Aunt Anna, eager for information about the new country that is to receive her as a bride.

“Oh, jolly little place—awfully jolly little place. When there I spend most of my time up in the Blue Mountains. I run up to Katoomba as soon as I leave the ship. Tell truth, my friends in Sydney have a way of getting up picnics for me and that sort of thing, don’t you know? Or I go to dinner, and after dinner they take me out in a little boat, and I have to tuck up my trousers and the water comes in. A great treat to me, don’t you know? after twenty years on water, to be

taken out in a little boat, and tuck up my trousers, and be rowed about the harbour."

One hot, airless night, he strolls up as I lean over the bulwarks. The moonlight falls on his old red face and kind old eyes.

"Fond of poetry?"

"That depends."

"Do you know 'The Lost Drink'?"

His eyes twinkle in the moonlight. Two or three girls gather round us. He looks at us with half-funny, half-melancholy looks, and begins a parody on "The Lost Chord." It tells of a man who had got a drink once—a wonderful drink. He never could get another like it. All his life he searched for the man who mixed it for him. And so on. And so on. Until he is left with the hope that on the other shore he will find that drink once more. Poor old doctor! Is there a reason hidden beneath his kindly gaiety, that gives that song a peculiar meaning to him? The ship says he looks upon the wine when it is red—I suppose most ship doctors do. And the pathos of the recitation—or is it bathos?—does not die away from my mind for a long time.

Ah, me! What a mixture we all are!

Mr. Bowles is a plump young Australian in white flannels, who always says "Hearts is," when trumps are turned up at whist. Can any one help detesting a man in white flannels who says "Hearts is"?

Then there are three sunburnt tea-planters from Ceylon—Mr. Wigram, Mr. O'Donnell, and Mr. Hobson, Scotchman, Irishman, and Englishman—all coming back from seeing their "maters," all bachelors, and all suffering a recovery from a series of farewelling. A passenger asks Mr. Wigram to write in her autograph book one night. She is a lady who has loudly com-

mented on the disgraceful condition of Those Men From Ceylon, who—and to be quite just—are really *only* suffering a recovery. I saw the three of them stealing out of the saloon with the book in their hands. Later on Mr. Wigram comes back and gives it to its owner. His line of poetry is :

“The stag at eve had drunk its fill.”

And the writing matches the sentiment. It doesn't look in the least sober.

It is in the second week of the journey that the unloveliness of the human race becomes most apparent.

Is there, then, no such thing as a nice man or a charming woman? When are we most ourselves? At sea or on land?

That is a problem I shall never be sure of.

The persons who appear to advantage by this time are the misanthropes, who have had nothing to do with any one. They have been here before. It is always an old traveller who begins by keeping aloof, and ends by being the only one any one still wants to know.

Next time I travel I'm going to be like Mr. Holt. He won't have anything to do with any one, except Aunt Anna and me, unless aged under eight. He sits in his deck-chair, reads, refuses to go to Committee Meetings, refuses to Put the Tail on the Pig, refuses to Chase Potatoes in the Tropics, refuses to play in Euchre Tournaments, to sing at Concerts, to get himself up for the Fancy Dress Ball, refuses all the allurements of social life at sea, and just reads and smokes, and walks the deck, and plays deck billiards with an old man who is nearly stone deaf. “This is the way to travel,” he says, when we grumble at the people whom we have always with us.

Did anybody ever say the earth would be all right

only for the Well-Meaning People ? Or has it been left to me ? I won't shirk the task. I'll say it loud and long.

I took to getting up early. I had my bath overnight, and was up on deck before the sun. All in vain. Always there was a woman coming towards me, and always on the tip of her tongue was a remark, and—well, always my bringing up saved *her* if it nearly killed me.

“ Good-morning. You're up early too ! ”

“ Good-morning. Yes.”

“ Isn't it lovely ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I do think it's so *lovely*.”

“ Yes.”

“ We ought to be getting our early tea soon.”

“ Yes.”

Then another well-meaning woman would join us, and—

“ Good-morning. You're up early too ! Isn't it *lovely* ? ” would follow, and presently they would reach the tea. By that time there would be a crowd round us, and the exquisite early air, flushed still with rose, would be filled with “ Good-mornings-you're-up-early-toos ” and “ Isn't-it-lovelys ? ” till all hope of merging into the morning's lovely mystery was lost for ever.

Another ship remark is “ Isn't it hot ? ” The answer to which is “ Oh, *isn't* it ? ”

But funnier than anything else is this : every time these hundreds of women pass each other, in the saloon, in the passages, on the stairs, on the decks, they *smile*. Into that smile they wildly try to put something—some deep, deep meaning, some message. Their effort is in vain. Yet they never pass each other without it.

Soon it becomes worn to shreds. Soon it is a mere pained pressing back of the lips, or a hollow enlargement of the eye. *Very* soon you learn to dread it as you see it coming towards you. You would do anything to dodge it. You go along the other side of the table if you have to meet it near. You try to pass it blankly, but your lips twitch in spite of yourself. In dozens, in hundreds, it is shot at you and every one else all day long. As every one passes every one, every one smiles. The ship is full of smiles. The air is full of smiles. Even the calm, wise sea is riddled with smile-shot.

But we are passing through the worst of the Tropics! So much must be forgiven us all.

Day after day we wake, cold with heat-moisture touched by the warm air. We get up more dead than alive. In the cramped space of our cabins we totter about wearily, looking for our clothes. We drag ourselves round to the baths, we float in cold salt water as long as the stewardess will leave us. Then comes the purgatory of dressing. It is only half-past seven, but the cabin is worse than an oven. Every movement is an effort. Slowly we begin to dress. Our faces, and necks, and arms, and hands drip, drip, drip. Before we have got into our white blouses we are almost worn out, melted away. It would kill us to put on collars. Powder is an absolute necessity. Never travel without it. We powder our arms and our throats, our hands and faces. We turn our necks down and down, further every day, until at last the whole ship comes to breakfast in an almost *décolleté* state. Even a thin chain round the neck is too much to be endured.

Breakfast, and melting stewards in white clothes, white shoes, and blazing red faces. The little brown

shutters are over all the portholes on the sunny side of the saloon. In the yellowy-brown light all the women look ghastly.

We crawl up on deck and flop into our chairs. The heat grows heavier, clammier. The sky is yellowy-grey, like smoke over fire. At eleven the stewards bring us ices on deck. By one we are nearly dead. All day long the melting continues. Stout people begin to look thinner. Thin people are like ghosts.

Day after day, day after day, we steadily melt away. And all night too.

Steadily, doggedly, I try to prevent my thoughts dropping down through the misty heat—down, down to the steerage, where the man I love is stifling in the blanket-like atmosphere. With all the philosophic calm at my command I turn my mind away. Perhaps I shall go mad, I think, dwelling on the horrors of the steerage in the Tropics—horrors that Patrick is enduring with all his wonted strength and grit. But, no. It is too hot for going mad. Inert, listless, I simply *exist*.

All the stewards are going to leave at the end of the voyage. They always are, every voyage, in the Tropics. Half the passengers sleep up on deck. Others creep into the dining-saloon when night is well on, and lie on the floor, or on the divans against the walls. They are waked at half-past four by stewards beginning the day's scrubbing and sweeping. What a strange, weird time it is! I think everybody goes a little "dotty."

To sit still for fourteen days in a deck-chair, and find your hands and face slowly melting off you, gives you a queer feeling as if this isn't the world at all.

Round the corner is the doctor's cabin. Every one is dying and goes to him now. He treats every one

alike—a big, black pill. He has been through the Tropics how many scores of times? He knows that doesn't kill.

“Isn't this Hell, doctor?” said one woman.

“Hell! There's only one Devil in Hell!”

Oh, my gracious, what a time! Only two things are worth anything on earth—the thin, white blouse and the long, iced squash.

There are only three indispensable things for women this voyage—powder, white blouses, lemon-squashes.



## CHAPTER LII

### OVER THE LOPING LEAGUES OF SEA

HEAVENS ! The sort of people that travel ! What a disillusionment ! I cherished a secret idea that I would meet all kinds of delightful, charming, cultured people on a long sea voyage, and we'd talk about Shelley, and Rossetti, and Chopin, and Italy, and Greece. Or they would talk and I would listen. There would be moonlight thrown in, and a great stillness broken only by the murmuring of the waves.

But, no !

And, of course ! For those people are the poor things who have too much soul to make a fortune. They who travel to and from Australia are the money-makers, the business people—butchers, and bakers, and iron-mongers—people who don't waste time looking for the Unseen, but convert the visible into gold or silver as quickly as possible. Strange that I never thought of that till I came to sea.

Nothing can give one a more forceful—I might even say lurid—impression of the follies that go to make us men and women than a long sea voyage. There you see people without disguise. They have no sheltering home of their own to disappear into till their ugliness is forgotten a little, nor have we. No one has the advantage of being able to drape himself or herself with the little things of life that act as drapes and flouncings, such as big houses and little

houses, friends and relatives, and the nice things every one knows about one that here have to be learned anew by every one. When you have seen three hundred women unveiled in this way, you cannot help but shudder—not at them, but at yourself for being like them. They all have the same tricks. So have you ; only you never knew they were tricks until you saw them displayed *en masse* hour after hour.

They all turn up their eyes in the same way. They all tell the same lies. They all repeat the same superficial observation as if they meant it. They all ask silly questions about each other's healths. "How are you this morning?" "How are you to-day?" They all don't care a bit about the answers. They all do this, and they all do that, affected theatrical little things. Harmless indeed ; but when repeated again and again their significance leaps out at you, and the horrible decadence of modern people makes you distrust yourself and every one else. When these things are presented to you, not singly—yourself the actress—not in threes or fours—your friends the performers—but in scores, and fifties, and hundreds, daily, hourly, on every occasion, you see through your sex, you see through the race, and you understand how few indeed are the single-minded, the sincere ; and you can never again have the same old trust in people whom you had no reason to distrust. So much for the people.

But the journey, the journey ! Oh, why has it never been put into song or story ? All the waves went out of the sea, and our ship marched on and marched on, day after day, night after night, through the warm, still ocean. I was always gazing at that great, shining reach all round me ; but though I grew to know it well, so that it never could be forgotten

or misunderstood again, I could not satisfy myself with a parallel beautiful and true enough.

One day the real thing flashed across me—like frozen castor oil!

After that I gave up looking for similes and accepted things as they were.

Ah, well! The Indian Ocean teaches one the mockery of living on land and thinking you know the meaning of blues and greens. As if any one could know even half the blue in the world who had never lived a month on water! Hour after hour I sit on deck without weariness, watching that great flood passing under my eyes. It lies so still, day after day, week after week, that I can't believe it is The Sea. Yet ever its colour changes. To-day it shines like a polished floor built of a single turquoise. To-morrow, thick and deep, it lies over the face of the earth, like millions of melted sapphires. The creamy pink on our ship's side is reflected on the polished surface; it turns a pale, moving violet there as we pass along. Then there are days when some one seems to have poured down a sea full of blue-green oil, so bright, so heavy, so deeply coloured, that you feel as if you could cut with a knife the *colour* alone. Then there are other days when all the thickness and solidity go out of it, and it lies like a pale-blue, fragile sky dropped from Heaven for us to voyage over.

Sometimes Aunt Anna and I sit for hours in our cane chairs on the deck, gazing out over the drowsing, dreaming Ocean. Sometimes Arnold Holt comes and sits with us, and a beautiful, intimate silence falls over us all. Arnold Holt speaks to no one on board. So no one dares approach us when he is there.

And the sunsets!

I have learned a sky secret. The setting steals its

meaning from the lands over which it sets. As we move along, the sunsets change with the rest of the world. As we came near Egypt, they took on sharp outlines and burning colours. Night after night the breathless end of day in the Tropics sees the Ocean turn blood-red under an immense sky as scarlet as Hell, and swept with wild greens and burning yellows. The sea seems to set as well as the sky. And far back, as the train hurried us through Italy, the sky was soft and tender. One great, kind wash of rose swept the sun plains, and over it all hovered simple, white clouds. Italy was the place of water-colour sunsets that stirred the breast dimly, like sweet, faint music away in the distance.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of travelling is that the most beautiful is always to come—remembrance hoarded away in the future, waiting for us, till the present becomes past, and the joy of these lovely days, now so near, recedes, and we can look back, and look, and look, and call up days stored with golden moments, when there was no veil between us and the beauty of the world.

## CHAPTER LIII

### ON BOARD A BIG SHIP

THE Earth World has faded quite away, life begins and ends with the doings on board this miniature, white world—"The Oronto."

To this famous Colonial politician in white duck clothes, to pick up all the potatoes and get back with them to the bucket before any one else in the Potato Race is of far greater importance than having secured Mr. Asquith's assistance in his great Imperial scheme. The Scheme is the concentration of a lifetime. The Potatoes are only the Potatoes of an hour. But the Potatoes knock the Scheme to smithereens and turn the Politician into a cross little boy when that old man with the grey moustache from New Zealand slips the last potato into the bucket and wins the race.

All round us gleam sunny sky and sunny sea. The earth has disappeared. It never was. It never will be again.

That is merely a specimen of the chaotic way in which one thinks at sea. We have heard of Sea-Legs in contradistinction to Land-Legs. There are also Sea-Brains. Their chief characteristic is slipperiness. Everything slides off them. The books we read, the thoughts we think, all drop helplessly to the deck, and lie about there in dull but not unhappy confusion. And what does it matter? The Sea is the King of Lotus-Eaters, and we are in his land to-day. Who

is foolish enough to want to be keen, to desire to think clear, deep, penetrating thoughts, to bother about the thoughts of other people put into books with labour ?

Besides, the heart doesn't think. It doesn't need to. And through all this long, sun-bleached, sun-dyed voyage my heart is the only part of me that is really alive. As I sit about the ship, dress, eat, talk, I move automatically like a wax figure that has only an outside, for all the time the real me is down in the steerage with a big, fair, broad-shouldered man, going as he thinks, alone, to a lonely life in a lonely land. To me, conscious of his nearness in this big white world of a ship, it doesn't seem possible that he should think my physical being thousands of miles away in the chill, grey land we have left behind us. But he does think it. For never once have I impinged upon my bargain with Arnold Holt and given Patrick the smallest indication of my presence.

I watch the sea wash the earthiness out of these hundreds of people. It sweeps away their scheming plots and plans. It turns them back towards their childhood. Ah, if it had them long enough, it would make them all as lovely at heart as its great, simple, unscheming self. But that cannot be. And in the interval, while the sea wipes out their earth-life, and they are in the transition stage, they alternate between Simple, Happy Children and Restless Beings robbed of their acquired heritage of plot and plan, search for money, struggle for fame.

All day long we do nothing. And yet there is never an unoccupied moment. The days are filled to the brim. We often go to bed tired out. Perhaps the fatigue springs from these hundreds of individualities pressing so closely and continuously on us. All day

they are with us and all night. We can never get away from them. The ego aches as if it were in a cramped sardine-box. It wants to go off by itself sometimes, in the queer way egos have. But the sardine-box holds it tight. All it can do is to kick a little at the lid.

What do we do all day ?

The First Class, which always represents Fashion, gives a Ball, and doesn't invite the Second Class. The Second Class, which invariably represents Intellect, gives a Party, and hangs up the notice of it in *Greek*.

The First Class doesn't know Greek. It comes, and looks at the notice, and goes away baffled.

In the day-time the great white decks are surrounded with nets. There we play our games. The hours are mapped out with never-ending pastimes. The Programmes hang at the top of the hatchway. At ten o'clock Ladies play off Deck Billiards ; Meeting of Fancy Dress Ball Committee in Saloon ; Bottle-Driving Tournament begins. At eleven Meeting of Committee to arrange Children's Maypole Dance ; Rehearsal of " Sunset " ; the second Calcutta Sweep to be drawn. At twelve the Hon. John Jones and Sir Peter Squail, Met. C., play off their dead heat in Throwing the Sand-bag.

And perhaps at twelve-thirty there is a funeral in the Steerage. The Purser is reading the Burial Service. The ship grows suddenly quiet. Her motion is slowed. Many passengers go to look over into the steerage. Many others turn away and bury themselves in their books. A few weep. A door high up in the ship's side is opened. Something wrapped in brown canvas is thrown out. It drops down, down, into the waves. And we have passed on. Already It is half a mile behind.

For an hour a shadow is cast over the ship. Who was he ? An old man. What did he die of ? Heart-disease. Was he alone ? Quite alone, going out to his son in Sydney. Then the gloom lifts and life goes on again as usual. It seems a little less important, that is all. That brown bag tossed to the waves, without hearse or coffin or crape, gives Death a new simplicity.

At two-thirty the Great Ladies' Cricket Match begins—Australia versus New Zealand. Everybody on board tries to get a look. The decks are crowded. Wild "barracking" goes on. It is a fiercely hot afternoon. To lie on a block of ice would seem far more suitable than to play a Cricket Match. But the teams are in such deadly earnest that temperature is nothing to them. They all wear white linen frocks and sailor hats. Some are matrons with big families. Some are old maids. Some are young girls. Many of them never threw a ball in their lives before. But—or perhaps I should say *so*—mercy on us, how they throw them now ! What excitement prevails ! An Inter-Colonial match on land is nothing to this in mid-ocean. The Australianism of the Ship comes out. The Land of Cricketers asserts itself. Over the Indian Ocean go wild whoops and huzzas, bursts of clapping, loud, spontaneous bravos, and mad cheers and peals of laughter. There are men crowded about the Match who have beaten all England on its own wicket, but there isn't a trace of scorn in their eyes as they watch this exhibition of pure feminine heroics. Their blazing red faces are full of the keenest interest. Never in their lives have they beheld cricket like this : where the woman with the longest skirts is the best fielder ; where the batswoman blinks and jumps when the ball comes towards her, and looks away to sea as she hits out



before her ; where the bowler is changed every minute or two ; where the Umpire is treated with deliberate scorn ; where one of the Eleven slips out and gets a girl from the “ attendance ” to come in and take her place, and then returns and plays herself, and makes her substitute stay on and play also till discovered.

At four o'clock the Match is suspended, while the ship goes down to tea. At four-thirty it continues, and lasts till Dinner-Time, when—well, I won't say which side wins. You shall remain as we were—at sea.

And at night—a breathless furnace of a night—the band plays the “ Blue Danube ” on the lighted decks, and the old Indian Ocean looks up at our red lights and sees white shoulders and black figures revolving, and watches, through the portholes, people playing card tournaments in the Saloon, and wonders why those strange things don't feel the heat.

We *do* feel it, as a matter of fact. But, by some mysterious accident, we have all been set going and can't stop ourselves. And, besides, nothing matters. To be hot is of as little importance as to be cool. It is easier to play cricket than to refuse to play. These are the ethics of Life at Sea.

## CHAPTER LIV

### THE SCARLET-SCENTED CITY

It is early, early in the morning when I sit up in my berth and look through my porthole and see a foreign sail cut clear against a misty rose-and-onyx sky ; a tall, brown, curving sail leaning above a low, brown dhow, and in the dhow a black man guiding his craft.

The East ! the East ! the East ! How it thrills ! How it stuns ! The curved sail, the silent black, the onyx sky are blown with magic. They thrust one into a new world. Yet from the deck, later, Colombo looks like many more westerly places with its gardens gleaming down to the harbour's edge.

Over the waters we go gaily, a party of eight. The rose has left the sky. The harbour of Colombo is black with swarming craft and loud with hundreds of native voices. Our black oarsmen guide us towards that low line of emerald rising out of the waves. Nearer and nearer, till the green trees and the red houses are almost upon us, and we have come to Ceylon.

We land, and stand stunned on the wooden pier.

“ You lady ! You lady ! You lady ! ”

A deafening babble of voices, a sea of brown faces and turbaned heads. Overhead a blazing sky. We are in the Orient.

Dozens of rickshaw-men gather round us. They almost drag us to their vehicles, clamouring, coaxing, beseeching. It is a wonder we don't leave a limb or

two among them. We are going to the hotel at the water's edge—the Oriental. It is only a few steps, so we walk, laughing insanely. We all go out of the wooden shed into the scarlet street. We are dazed with many waters, and stand, stunned again, looking along the flat town. A great, gay note of red rises and comes towards us. The earth underfoot is red. Against the rose-sky flame-trees rear their great, red, leafless flowers. And there are scarlet houses and bazaars all round us. But all is kept in perfect Oriental harmony by the impression of greenness from cocoanut-trees, the blue sea flowing near, and the scent of heavy flowers.

Life ! It seizes and pinions us for a moment, then tosses us to the winds, and says, " Play, children, play ! I made the world for a playground for you, and you would not understand. Now you can see my meaning. Play, play, play ! "

Everybody plays.

Old, fat men and women, old, thin men and women, quiet people, thoughtful people, girls and youths, and children and babies all yield to the mad intoxication of Colombo, and rush here and there, on foot or in rickshaws, laughing, screaming, jabbering all the long day. Tho hotels are full of our ship's passengers. We meet them everywhere. At the Oriental we come across them in the cool, bare, stained halls, on the verandahs, in the great, shady dining-hall, where bare-foot Cingalese go noiselessly about with solemn, black eyes, white clothes, and white turbans, carrying fragrant Ceylon tea and coffee, dishes of strange fruits, dishes of curries, to these glad Australian people, who have renewed or deepened their youth in this one day's holiday from the sea.

The first ride in a rickshaw is a tremendous sensa-

tion. You feel like a queen. You own the whole world. You have a *man*—a flesh-and-blood man—running in harness between the shafts of your tall, black perambulator with two big wheels and a hood that goes up and down. Off he tears. His rate is desperately swift. He is so thin that you fear he will break in pieces, that you will be arrested for cruelty to dumb animals. Bones stick out of his shoulders, elbows, knees, and feet. He is a very highly polished trotter. His skin catches the sun on it and shines like a looking-glass. Through the warm electric air you dash. Your spirits go up, and up, and up. You try to remember London. How far, far away it seems ! Its trams and buses and trains and crowded, seething streets seem to exist only in a dream. This is the only life you have ever known. In one moment, with one step from a boat to a wharf, you have changed your identity. All responsibilities vanish down the scented street. A great hand seems to slap you back into the primeval gaiety of a simple savage.

All the while we ride children and women run along beside us in the golden sunlight.

On the red road by the sea a tiny, naked siren rolls her soft, black eyes at my left, and tosses her bare arms in attitudes that would madden an artist.

“ Gimme me pocket-money, you nice Auntie ! ”

The haunting cadences of her baby voice steal down into the senses. As she has no clothes at all, “ pocket-money ” is not without humour.

She and other little girls and boys throw big, stalkless purple-and-yellow flowers into our laps. They cry, “ I gif them you, you, my nice *mum-ma* ! ” We take the flowers. They run along beside us for a quarter of a mile. Then they begin to beg payment. “ You giv me monnee, lady,” wail their plaintive

voices. If you don't, next act in the comedy sees them try and grab their flowers away from you, and sees you toss them out. Then they pick them off the scarlet road, and dash away towards another rickshaw, where some other laughing and enraptured traveller flies along in the same maze of delight as your own.

All day long we rush through the township in rickshaws, Aunt Anna, Mr. Holt, and I—through the Cinnamon Gardens, round the Lake, out to Mount Lavinia, by that wonderful road along the sea's edge. For seven miles we drive in the shadow of tangled cocoanuts, banyans, and trees that are strangers to us. I said to myself as we drove, "Tiger, tiger, burning bright," and almost expected to see one. How delightful to me would have been the sight of two snapping eyes from that jungle on the right! By the way, it wasn't a jungle at all; but how could I resist calling it so?

Everybody does the same thing. At Mount Lavinia we meet our ship's people in hundreds.

Ah, Mount Lavinia! How bitter-sweet it was to come to you and go away! You scented hill, sloping down to the shimmering Indian Ocean, with a hotel on your summit, and green gardens full of fair women in white frocks drinking tea on the verandahs or in the shade on the grass, with black men in white suits carrying teas and iced drinks to happy travellers, and a little warm breeze blowing spice and fragrance in their faces—how nice it must be to be you, and to give such pure, wild pleasure to so many thousands of artless, untravelled, unsophisticated people!

Says Arnold Holt, before the sun sets, "I'm going to buy some presents for both of you. Come along with me."

Off we tear in a rickshaw each, through the warm,

red, crowded, laughing, jangling, flower-scented streets. Mr. Holt is an old traveller. He knows a shop where you can get moonstones that don't drop out and turn into glass an hour after you have paid twenty times as much as they were worth for them. Aunt Anna is tired, and goes with a party of friends to the Galle Face, so I have Arnold Holt to myself.

"Now, how muchee you wantee these moonee stones?" begins he. We have entered one of these little shops near the Hôtel Oriental. We seat ourselves at a little table with a little Oriental table-cover on it, and half a dozen solemn men with lovely, pathetic black eyes grouped around us.

"Me welly poor mannee; me givee you fairee thing allee samee."

"Mr. Holt, they're not Chinamen! Talk plain English to them."

But such an old traveller as Arnold Holt could not possibly do that.

"Avez-vous des saphires? And show me your o-pal, and let's see your feel-a-gree, feel-a-gree. Comprenez?"

So he goes on. Heaven knows which is the more unintelligible—the merchants or Mr. Holt.

While he fights it out with them, and they come gradually—very gradually—from £20 to £1 10s., a dark creature says to me, sweetly, "I remember you, Lady."

I say I have never been here before, but he isn't abashed.

"You know Sirupert Jimmes?"

"Sir Rupert James?"

"You know Mr. 'Ordern?"

"Hordern?"

"You know Lady Dickenson?"

"No."

“ Oh, yes, Lady, *you* know Lady Dickenson. You know Sir John Georges.”

I get tired of disowning titled people, but he pulls out a dirty, filthy packet of cards and hands me one. On it is written, in terrific writing, with a little “ r ” and a little “ j,” Sur rupert jambs ; then another with a very swagger Colonial woman’s name on it, written in a Mary-Jane hand that would reduce the owner of the name to pulp.

“ Did they give you these ? ” I asked.

“ Yes, Lady.”

I laugh out loud, and he takes them away hastily. I hope the people represented on those dirty pasteboards may never have the painful shock of seeing *how* they are represented. What masterpieces of fraud they are, those innocent-eyed creatures ! Up to every trick on earth. They find out and remember the names of their customers ; then they write cards to show other people what a superior connection they have. But they give the other people too little credit for common sense. Probably because they encounter so little of it in their business dealings with travellers.

At last Mr. Holt has bought seven rings, pressed two on me, tied the rest up in his handkerchief, and off we go for a wild race round the town, behind two pairs of twinkling black legs.

Any one who has ever been to Colombo will never forget the temporary insanity that overtook them that yellow, breeze-blown day when they rushed through the scented, scarlet city among the palm-trees, from morn till dewy eve, buying, bargaining, laughing, screaming, all in a hurry, in a concentrated burst of gaiety, with three weeks’ sea behind and a fortnight’s sea to come. All too soon the wonderful day draws to an end. Nothing that may come later can raise

the same ineffable happiness as this first foreign port. Only one day, but to many people it will become a golden memory that will never cease to glitter a little through the humdrum of their lives when they "settle down" again.

Sunset finds us at the Galle Face, that great, gleaming, white hotel at the far end of the yellow sea-beach. The moon comes out. The cocoanut-trees wave in the sea-breeze. The Indian Ocean turns silver. A mile away the lights of Colombo gleam redly.

We dine at a little table in the window, looking out through palm-trees over the shining sea, and I think of Patrick and wonder what he is doing. I have caught no glimpse of him on shore, and that makes me feel a little doleful. But I must not let the others notice.

The great hall is full of chatter and laughter. The excitement of the early morning has deepened gradually all the day. It is at its height now. None of these women in their crushed white frocks and white straw hats, these men in grey slouch-hats and thin suits, ever had a trouble in their lives. Always they have lived here. Every night they have dined in this high white room with its many windows looking seawards, its lights, its bright fruit on the great stand in the centre, its black-bearded waiters stealing noiselessly about on bare feet. Then comes coffee on the verandahs, or out on the little green tables in the moonlight under the flickering cocoanut-trees.

The Cingalese merchants grow very urgent now. They have stalls in the hotel, little shops here and there all over the place. They *must* sell. We shall all be gone soon. Their prices begin to come down. Down, down, down, down, *down*.

And even further down.

In the morning this filigree necklet was thirty-five



shillings. After lunch it came down to twenty-five. After dinner it leapt from twenty to fifteen. Aunt Anna said, to get rid of the man, "Two shillings."

"Oh, Lady, 'ow can you?" said he. But down, down it came. From fifteen to twelve, twelve to ten, ten to five. And at last he thrust it into her hand and said, "Then you take it, Lady—two shillings." And then Aunt Anna had the brazenness to say she didn't want it.

At eleven o'clock every one, in a penniless condition, gets back to the big ship in the stream. What a monster she seems! What an enemy! How we hate the thought of returning again, screwing ourselves up, and resuming all the cramped conditions of life on a crowded liner.

But it has to be done. At twelve we move slowly, slowly. Ceylon recedes. The Magic Day is over.

Next morning a ship laden with moonstone brooches, filigree ornaments, ivory elephants, toy rickshaws, half-pounds of Ceylon tea, clean clothes washed in the lake at Colombo, and sunburnt, worn-out passengers ploughs her way towards her next landing-place—Fremantle. On board is a bewildered girl, who is known by the name of Teresa, but who doesn't know herself at all.

## CHAPTER LV

### OUTSIDE THE HYPNOTIC CIRCLE

SYDNEY at last !

A shimmering, exquisite city, lying stretched out at the World's End with a dauntless and undeterred yet gentle loveliness, that reminded me of some of those white, fair cities edging the Mediterranean's blue.

So deep were the harbours here that our great ship sailed onwards right into the very city itself, and we came to anchor at the end of the chief streets, which ran into a circular quay with a fine simplicity. We crossed the gangway, and, behold ! we had stepped straight into the heart of the city—the City of the South.

I looked about me, dazed with wonder.

The twelve thousand miles were over at last, and here I stood in this new land, which might perhaps prove my abiding-place for the term of my natural life.

Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye ! People were rushing at one another, kissing and shaking hands. Cabs and carriages were driving away, hands waving from within. Away, away, they all go, all the hundreds and hundreds of men, and women, and boys, and girls who have travelled these thousands and thousands of miles with us, day after day, week after week. Away, away into Australia. They were swallowed up. Many of them we never saw again, but a few grew into friends, whose friendship had a beauty that was

not terrestrial, for it began on the water, under the sky, and was sweetened for ever by that beginning.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and the month was early June. It was winter here, and in truth the air had a good cold nip in it, but the skies were an amazing blue, and the sun's rays had all the dazzle that the English eye connects with summer. A sense of exhilaration such as one feels in the highlands of Switzerland was in the air, which was so clear that one seemed able to see right across the Continent. Perhaps that was the first thing I noticed in Australia—the long, long way one was able to look—and soon I noticed that the eyes of the Australians had a far-off, distant expression, as though they were always gazing into infinite distances.

As Arnold Holt put us into a taxi, I suddenly clutched him by the arm, overcome by a dreadful fear.

"Suppose we lose sight of him!" I whispered agitatedly. "If he disappears, and we've no clue to his whereabouts, we may never be able to find him again."

"Don't you worry about that, Teresa. Leave it to me. I'll see to it that he doesn't disappear without our being able to find out where he goes to. In fact, I've seen to it already. Come! Get in with you!"

He smiled down at me as we drove along in the taxi.

"They've got a poem out here they call 'The Travelling Post Office!' he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "I guess if the worst comes to the worst over that young man of yours we'll send him a letter 'Care of Conroy's sheep.'"

And in his genial, unhurried, casual, yet significant voice, he droned out to me :

"The old man's son had left the farm, he found it dull and slow, He drifted to the great north-west, where all the rovers go.  
'He's gone so long,' the old man said, 'he's dropped right out of mind ;  
But if you'd write a line to him I'd take it very kind.



Aunt and my new Uncle, I began to feel a little woe-begone.

The ship, after all, had kept us together—it had seemed almost like being in the same house—and now a separation had indeed begun. I was here, shut up in the hotel with Aunt Anna and Arnold Holt, and I had no more idea than the man in the moon where Patrick was. Had he gone to a hotel? Was he sleeping on board to-night, waiting to see what would turn up? Or had he already found his way to the railway-station across the city and taken train for some of those unknown places out west? . . .

“Teresa, you’re not eating!” said a voice.

A gentle little hand touched mine with a gesture light as a bird’s, and Aunt Anna’s sweet eyes looked tenderly into my face.

“I’m off my feed a bit,” I said to her. “But that’s nothing. It’s only coming off the sea, I expect. It makes one feel a bit—a bit——”

I choked, and a big tear splashed on to my plate.

“I—I think I’ll go to our sitting-room,” I said.

Arnold Holt jumped up and went with me through the big dining-room, but when he had put me into the lift he left me, hurrying back to Aunt Anna.

It was only a small thing, his leaving me to find my way to the sitting-room alone, and it was certainly the most natural thing in the world, considering that Aunt Anna was his wife, and she was left alone in the dining-room of a strange hotel, but in my overstrung condition, following on my late exalted mood, it hurt me and gave me a ridiculous sense of being wanted by nobody.

When I reached the sitting-room door, I hesitated a moment, uncertain whether to go in there or make my way straight to my bedroom; but even while I was hesitating some one opened the door for me from inside.

“ I heard your footstep ! ” said a voice.

And there stood Patrick.

After a moment I tottered forward, shutting the door behind me, but I did not fall into his arms for the simple reason that the arms were closed and barricaded against me, folded across his chest.

“ How did you get here ? ” I gasped.

“ I came,” he replied, with equal brilliancy.

Only two words.

But the tone of them and the glance that went as their accompaniment instantly advised me that something was wrong.

For twelve thousand miles, from one end of the world to the other, day after day and week after week, I had followed this man for love of him, renouncing home, parents, brothers, sisters, and native land for the sake of being on the same continent with him. And now we had met. And ye gods, what a meeting ! It was so utterly removed from anything my imagination could ever have pictured that I felt stirring somewhere within my breast a faint, invisible laughter—ah, but bitter, ironic laughter, such as the soul of Heine might have represented to Matthew Arnold—a laughter as of life out of tune, ringing with a subtle, cruel hand the wrong bells, that first suggested music and then dispelled the illusion with cynical discords.

He was pale and stern. He was thinned by the voyage and the steerage food almost to the point of attenuation. And as was usual with him in moments of intense emotion, an almost grotesque rigidity had taken possession of him, as if expressing in the fixedness of his physical self the tight, difficult, tied-up condition of his soul.

A pretty welcome, this !

After a moment, unable to look at him any longer,

I let my glance slip about the room. One by one the objects there photographed themselves with an incredible vividness upon my brain. I saw a floor covered with matting and overlaid with two blue-and-red rugs ; four big armchairs covered in red-and-brown velvet ; a round table with a brown plush cloth edged with chenille fringe ; walls crammed with pictures and photographs that would have been better in the fire ; mantelpiece and little tables and whatnot massed with common china ornaments so stupid and so ugly that I could frame no possible excuse for their existence, though later on, when I came to know Australia better, I discovered that this was one of the characteristics of the people out there, this heaping of ornament upon ornament, and this determination to crowd the rooms with as much as possible—entirely regardless of its quality or significance. . . .

Looking at these things vaguely, my thoughts went wandering. . . . I wondered if it were difficult to find antiques out here. . . . Then I remembered hearing of the wonderful things that had been brought out by some of the early settlers and Government officials a century before, and how one found treasures sometimes of wonderful old silver and furniture and prints and engravings in this new land at the far, far end of the world. . . . Then with a bang I came back to the present.

“ How did you know where I was ? ” I said.

I sat down suddenly.

“ Won’t you sit down ? ” I added quietly.

“ No. I haven’t come to stay. I’m going presently.”

“ Really ? ”

I laughed. I am sure no one who heard it would have guessed my laughter was ironical. It sounded quite natural.

“ But at least you’ll tell me what you came for ? ”  
I said pleasantly.

Once I had been in love with this man or had imagined myself so. Once I had thought that the only thing that made life worth living was to be near him. Once I had cried aloud in agony to Aunt Anna that if I were separated from him I should die. Once I had seen in him the beginning and end of everything. Once I had longed with the resistless passion of a fanatic to cut myself into a thousand little pieces or do something else equally sensational and useless for his sake. Once I had set out on a hare-brained journey across the world out of sheer terror of losing sight of him.

And now——

A couple of cold, calm, impassive young people stood and surveyed each other with cool, indifferent glances, in which, if there was any emotion at all, there was dislike.

“ Mr. Holt came down and spoke to me this morning. . . . It was about an hour before we came inside the Heads. . . . It was while we were on board. . . . He asked me to come round this evening at eight o’clock. . . . ”

He paused.

“ And you said you would come,” I added aptly.

“ Pardon me. I said nothing of the kind. I said I could not and would not come. In fact, I think I said that nothing would induce me to come.”

“ In fact, you said that you were engaged ? ”

But the irony of that, which I intended to be deadly, passed him by unnoticed.

“ I didn’t say I was engaged, because one isn’t generally engaged at the end of a five weeks’ journey across the ocean. But I said that I didn’t see why I



should come. I was stunned at first. I thought Mr. Holt was joking with me. I didn't really believe that you were on board until he took me to a point where I was able to see you away on the upper deck, with my own eyes. . . . You were standing near your aunt, looking out in front of you."

"Looking an awful sight, I suppose!" I put in now. "Everybody looks at their worst at the end of a long sea voyage. When I looked at myself in the glass this morning, I could see that my features had all gone out of shape. Of course, one's hair comes out of curl. And the sea is deadly for complexions. Please do sit down! Unless you're going immediately?"

"Yes, I'm going immediately. . . ."

"And then, after refusing Mr. Holt's invitation, you changed your mind afterwards and came?"

"Yes, I changed my mind afterwards and came."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to see you."

"How kind of you!"

"I wanted to tell you what I thought of you."

"Tell me, then! I'm dying to know."

"It isn't so much what I think of you as what you think of me." He was incoherent and more rigid than ever, and I thought that if he didn't relax his bones would surely crack. And how plain he was! How ordinary! How almost—no not almost, but quite—common! Was it possible I had ever thought him good-looking?

For I had stepped outside the hypnotic circle at last. I could see him now as other people saw him.

He was a plain, dull, uninteresting, commonplace young man, the last person in the world that one could ever fall in love with.

## CHAPTER LVI

### LOVERS

RISING, I walked to the window and looked out.

For weeks past I had been surrounded with beauty, washed in and out as it were with a floating stream that was now gold and now rose and now onyx—a floating stream of warmth and aliveness that kept opening the flood-gates of my vision and letting in one loveliness upon another till my eye had all but forgotten that there was any solid unloveliness left on this earth. And then, entering the hotel and shut off suddenly from beauty, I had experienced a sensation of chafing restraint as though some one had tied a bandage over my eyes, or put out all the lights everywhere. . . .

So great, so sudden had been the change, that when I reached the window of our sitting-room and came face to face with Nature again, I had to put my hand to my head to steady myself, while the hideous chairs and china ornaments and plush-covered table danced a receding fandango out of my brain-cells, closing the doors of the cells behind them with a loud and irritated slam.

For beauty had come back again.

Like one transfixed I stood, gazing upon the scene that lay stretched out before my eyes.

Our sitting-room was high up in the hotel, facing eastward. A silver moon was rising, and in her wake

gleamed these unaccustomed foreign stars in the blue-black reaches of the skies. Purple-blue spangled with silver, of a colossal height and magnificence, were these skies, as though the heavens had vaulted upwards with a mammoth leap and hung above us at an altitude unknown in the Old World across the sea. Far, far below lay the city all white and dainty in the moonlight, her churches and houses not massed together in vast, bewildering blocks, but presenting an aspect of fragility from the empty spaces in their silhouettes along the sky.

Somewhere in the near distance there were gardens—I was sure of it—gardens with tropic flowers and trees—whose breath stole sweet and sharp upon the air, whispering to me “Australia!” The wind rose and a palm-tree waved, and looking beyond it I discerned a silver stretch of water, that seemed to engirdle the city tenderly and then flow away from it outwards towards the Pacific. The red-and-green lights of steamers drew moving lines across the water, and a forest of masts and the ghostlike sails of vessels from all parts of the world glistened in the moonlight.

And over it all brooded the ineffable quality of the unknown.

Then away across the water I saw silver-studded promontories, where houses with hanging gardens shed gay lights athwart the moonshine, telling of homes and families, of loves, and hates, of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters.

Out in the harbour, between the city and the northern shores, lay a great black vessel, brilliantly outlined with lights, and from this vessel came stealing the music of an orchestra, and then I saw forms revolving. It was an English warship, whose officers were giving a dance to the pretty Sydney women. Beautiful and friendly this new land looked, giving itself none

of the cold and distant airs that some new countries seem to breathe upon one, and yet for all its friendliness, what should my heart do but give a loud and sickening sigh for a grey old house in Kensington, and some dingy black trees in a windswept square. I felt as if never till that very moment had I realised the mad step I had taken in running away from them all. My mother's face swam before me. I heard Peggy's laughter. Strangest of all, I experienced an almost intolerable longing to see Papa's grizzled head and hear his peremptory voice again. And Hilary, and Ermytrude and Alice, and Geoffrey and Dick, and Sarah and Jane, . . . was it possible I had left them all for a mania that had at last, at last, discovered itself to me in its true light? Love? Had I really ever called it love? Not a stir of my pulses now. Not a trace of that old fire—nothing but an immense longing to keep him at a distance, now and always.

Again I looked at him.

But if I had hoped to find him improved I was disappointed. In these last few minutes while my back was turned to him, he seemed to have been increasing in commonness, till a cold scorn at my own folly in ever having imagined him dear and desirable assailed me, and nipped me as an east wind some little struggling plant. . . .

He was speaking now.

"It isn't so much what I think of you as what you think of me. You knew I was coming to Australia. You knew I was on the 'Oronto.' You deliberately followed me out."

"I must have been mad!" I breathed.

Again I sank into a chair, my legs suddenly refusing to support me.

“Perhaps you were sane,” he said bitterly. “That’s a better word for you, perhaps. You thought I wasn’t capable of fighting out my destiny myself. You were afraid for me. You let your imagination build up all sorts of pictures about my weakness and unluckiness and inability to grapple with life—just as any other woman would have done.”

I opened my mouth to speak.

But somehow or other no words came.

Perhaps they were paralysed—poor little stammering words, that might have risen up and refuted these things he was saying—or perhaps they hid themselves out of pride, refusing to be uttered in the presence of such injustice.

“The truth is, you’ve never really known me, and yet you’ve never let me see what you thought of me.”

He turned away and took a few paces up and down the room, while I, crouching back in the big red chair, watched him and waited.

“Once you made me believe that you loved me,” he said, coming to a halt in front of me and looking down at me with a pair of hard, incriminating eyes. “But what is love? You called it love, and I believed you. But what’s the good of love when distrust is there? I can see now that you’ve always distrusted me. You’ve never believed in me. You were always sorry for me. You pitied me! And that means *despised* me! And your coming out to Australia after me has given me the final proof of it. It won’t do for me—that sort of thing. You should have left me alone and let me prove to you what I can do. I wanted a chance to show you. I didn’t want you to help me, to pity me, to look after me. I’m not made that way. The reason I came out here was that I wanted to get right away from you and all belonging

to you, where I could do things off my own bat, and make my way without your people being able to say that they'd had a finger in my pie. . . . But that's just what you didn't think I could do, isn't it? You've got a strong will, and that will has carried you all the way out here after me because you didn't think I was capable of getting along by myself. . . . Well, let me tell you, when I knew what you had done, I felt as if Hell had been let loose about me."

He walked about the room a little more.

"I suppose you think I'm being brutal to you," he said, "but you can't realise how I felt when Arnold Holt told me that you and your Aunt and himself had been on the 'Oronto' all the time."

"You said you'd refused to come here this evening," I broke in suddenly. "Why did you change your mind?"

"Because——"

I had risen now and was facing him, and it would have been hard to tell which of us two was the whiter.

"Because I wanted to have it out with you," he said, at last.

"And have you finished having it out with me?" I asked.

"I've said what I came to say."

"You've crushed me, in fact!"

"I didn't come to crush you."

"But I *am* crushed, all the same. Who wouldn't be? . . . You've succeeded in proving to me that you're an heroic young man, gloriously independent, quite capable of working out your own destiny without the interference of other people. I'm sure of it. If I ever doubted it, you've convinced me of it now. You're the man whom Fate 'baffles to fight better.'

As you say you're capable of doing everything off your own bat. . . . Just let me tell you this—I *never doubted it.*"

I moved towards the door.

"I'll call my Aunt and Uncle," I said.

"I don't want to see them. . . . Please don't call them. . . . Wait. . . . Don't call them yet. . . . Just a minute. . . . How can you tell me you never doubted me when your coming here shows so plainly that you were afraid for me."

"It's rather a pity you didn't wait to ask me why I came to Australia," I answered bitingly, "before you jumped to the conclusion that I had come after you. As a matter of fact, I came with Aunt Anna when she married Mr. Holt because they chose Australia for their honeymoon trip."

Just then it occurred to me to wonder why Arnold Holt had been so sure that Patrick would come to us to-night in spite of his refusal to do so.

What a deep understanding of human nature was that large-hearted man's, that he had been able to send me up to the sitting-room alone, quite confident that Patrick would be there waiting, at the hour he had cunningly appointed!

I looked at him and saw him start and change after he had studied me for a moment.

"Why, your eyes are full of hatred," he said. "You look like a witch. . . . Teresa, Teresa! . . . Why do you stare at me like that?"

"I suppose because I feel like it. . . . It's extraordinary. . . ."

"I didn't know about their being married," said Patrick now. "I imagined you'd persuaded them to come out with you in order to—to—well, to look after me."

“And if I had?” I blazed out suddenly. “If I *had* come after you, as you surmise, if I *had* induced them to accompany me, and if the whole object of our journey was *you*, do you think it’s a very manly thing of you to taunt me with it? To scold and upbraid and snub me? Oh, you are cruel, cruel! I always knew you were hard-hearted, but I never dreamed you could treat me like that. . . . I used to care for you once, I suppose. . . . Yet I can’t even recall the memory of what it felt like. . . . It’s all gone . . . it’s all dead. . . . I must have been hypnotised or mad. . . . There’s nothing about you—absolutely *nothing*—that appeals to me now. . . . In fact, everything about you makes me dislike you. . . . I can’t tell you how much I dislike you. . . . I think you’re an odious young man. . . . I see you as a mountain of conceit and egotism, and underneath the conceit and egotism is the very last kind of man in the world I could ever care about—absolutely the very last!”

A woman who has once denied her love makes herself accessible to all the hidden secrets of cruelty, and a sort of superhuman desire to wound now took possession of me.

And now, all suddenly, strange things began to happen.

A metamorphosis commenced before my eyes.

As my little sword went stab, stab, stabbing into that cold, impassive rock, it reached the point where there was blood.

Sharp pain swept through his eyes.

And with the pain there was bewilderment, incredulity, an almost childlike amaze.

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” I asked him fiercely.

He came over and looked down at me.



A low voice spoke.

“ Do you know what the first news was that greeted me when I landed this morning ? Shall I tell you, Teresa ? Perhaps you’ll understand then what it feels like to know you’ve journeyed all these thousands and thousands of miles only to witness a fresh stage of my failure. Holder was the only man I knew in Australia—absolutely the only one. I was counting on him—God only knows how recklessly I was counting on him !—to give me work. And the first thing I learnt when I went to make inquiries about him was that—*Holder’s dead !* ”

## CHAPTER LVII

### ATTRACTION

“ *DEAD !* ”

Slowly I lifted my head.

The word as I uttered it went reverberating round the room, waking with its echoes those strange, imperative images of dread and dismay and terror that that word of all others has the power to evoke. Then sharply there came to me the significance of this thing to the young man standing there. He had staked his all on Holder. He had left his own country and set out to the ends of the world with no character, no money in his pocket, no one to come to his assistance, no single asset on earth except his own pluck and the fact that he knew Holder, and Death had snatched Holder out of his reach, leaving him alone and probably destitute on these alien southern shores.

“ Oh, poor, poor Patrick ! ” I gasped out, when I could speak. “ Oh, you must know—you must believe—how sorry I am ! ”

Then even as I looked my companion had changed right back into the Patrick of long ago. No longer was he ordinary and pertinacious and conceited and common. He was again the poor boy struggling against hard odds, who, by some queer trick of personality, had made me wholly his victim. All I had ever seen in his face was there again. Again he was comely

and good to look at. Again I saw him as my hero, with a beautiful if stubborn mouth and eyes like a hawk's.

But was it he who had changed ?

Was it not rather I ?

For his suffering had melted the piece of ice in my heart.

I was crying now.

But that didn't seem to matter.

The unreal sense of being an actor with him in a drama had vanished, and real words that matched real feelings were the only things that would come to me.

I buried my face in a cushion, and let my feelings surge over me at their will, surrendering myself to what dear old Calverley would have called "the billowy ecstasy of woe," and crying there in that hideous armchair in the sitting-room of a strange hotel at the Antipodes I suddenly discovered that I was immensely afraid. In fact, I was permeated with fear. It flowed like a scorching tide through all my veins, and the more I cried the more I realised how much had I to fear. For the ice had slipped clean out of my heart, and the old currents had caught me again and were pulsing fiercely between us, drawing me nearer and nearer to him every moment ; and supposing he would have none of me ?—supposing my coming out here to witness this final discomfiture had spoilt it all, spilled the sweet essence of our love, let loose the fragrance, made of it all a harsh, dull thing that hurt one when one looked ?

"Don't cry !" said a voice that was rough and frightened and tender all at once.

And as in a dream I knew that the unreal things that baffle and confuse us all in this little difficult

journey called life were dropping away from him also as they had just dropped away from me.

“ I’m not crying. I’m——”

But my hypocritical sentence was never finished.

It passed into incoherence on my part, matched with an equal incoherence on his.

“ . . . What in God’s name have I been saying to you that you should cry like that ? . . . Sit here on my knee,” said a voice. “ Cry here on my heart. . . . Oh, Teresa, . . . little Teresa. . . . What in God’s name have I been saying to you, my Angel, my Darling ! ”

Close, close he held me, and in the vast silence that descended upon us we clung together like drowning beings, seeing in each other our only escape from death to life, from the foolish, carping, persistent presence of the Tangible into the regions of the Invisible where real life begins.

## CHAPTER LVIII

### AUSTRALIA

A STRANGE, bewildering country, this. The trees are a different green, the birds have different notes, the brains of the people move in a different way, their manners and speech and dress present a thousand modifications on ours, which are the originals. They are infinitely cleverer than any of us ; they are quicker, deeper, more fervent, with their wide eyes asweep of the whole vast universe where our eyes seldom wander past our own tight little island's boundaries. But lacking control of speech and lacking art in the representation of their ideas, they grow incoherent with their enthusiasms, and soon bury one under their overflow of unsifted notions and criticisms.

Sydney is an exquisite city, but it is disappointing to come twelve thousand miles to find everything so modern.

Somehow journeying to the ends of the earth one expected to find ancient cities, with narrow streets, where black shades fell athwart the golden sunlight, and quaint antique houses leaned towards each other as if to whisper in some strange old tongue.

For these skies of dazzling blue and this riot of sunlight set up in one's heart the image of Italy, and then to hear the English language spoken on all sides and to see new houses everywhere makes one feel just a

wee bit flat, just as one would if one went to Italy and found rows of pretty, clean, new villas and modern, bright shops, and English people everywhere.

I love the way this great city of Sydney lies scattered far and wide about the winding harbour of Port Jackson.

The streets are hilly, and the crooked, casual, happy-go-lucky town runs up and down steep banks, whose feet dip into the harbour's water, and everywhere as one walks one glimpses gracious, sunny bits of blue, dancing and white-crested often under the wonderful winds that ever, ever blow here. The dust is maddening. The red in it sticks to one's petticoats, and Aunt Anna and I come home from our motor drives with thick red coats all over us, but the country fascinates us with its extraordinary trees and shrubs and flowers. There are no oaks, no elms, no larches, no beeches, no aspens, no plane-trees even. Instead there are grey gum-trees with bare white trunks, tall and infinitely graceful, breathing out that curious odour of eucalyptus, that seemed to us to characterise Australia from the moment we landed, just as the scent of new-mown hay characterises England, while the odour of orange-blossoms makes the French Riviera its own, and Rome breathes incense. Everywhere there are gum-trees, and one's impression is that Nature provided badly for this hot, sun-scorched world in covering it with such shadeless, though lovely, trees.

Never could one have imagined such tricks as Nature plays out here.

One day in the bush we came across a pallid, sickly looking tree ; and as I looked at it I suddenly became aware that it was covered with an extraordinary fruit. To all intents and purposes the fruit was a pear. It was split up the middle, and one saw inside the sectional divisions and the seeds. But instead of being

made of juicy, pulpy stuff, such as ordinary well-behaved pears are made of, this was composed of wood ! It was as hard as a log. You could throw it in the fire and burn it, and yet—except that it was wood—it was a pear.

Aunt Anna and I almost cried over the poor forlorn-looking thing. We wondered if it was wood trying to be a pear, or a pear trying to be wood.

Not far away was a cherry-tree, with quaint little fruit that kept their stones outside, where they stuck like lumps on the cherries' little red breasts.

The waratah—that tall, giant stalk with just one heavy red, scentless flower at the top of it—was another novelty whose name we had to learn to pronounce, putting the accent on the last syllable.

The lilly-pilly and the geebung grew close to the soil amid that multitudinous network of undergrowth that makes such a comfortable home for snakes. We tasted the little berries and made faces, but when we went out to the fruit-farms and orchards on the distant hills we held our breath in amazement, dumb before the riotous wealth of fruit that this wonderful country possesses.

How perfect the days would be if only one eloud could be removed from my horizon, and Patrick could find work ! But day follows day and week follows week, and I know that he has got nothing yet to do.

In the daytime I never see him, but every night when dinner is over I go up to our sitting-room and there he is.

There is nothing on earth so hard for a woman in love as not to ask questions, and I fight like a tigress sometimes with the question of questions that will rise to my lips. Tired he is ; the weight of strange people and a strange air hangs heavily upon him, and in this strange

air he is looking for himself, searching for his old belief in himself and perhaps evidencing his manhood by his depression before this genuine reason to be anxious which a woman's reckless and dangerous optimism might take more lightly until too late when the wolf walked in at the door.

"But in a new country," I said to him one night, "every man gets his chance. That's what they always say of new countries. Surely it isn't untrue?"

"In new countries, more than in old countries, they want the right people."

I kept myself very quiet. It would have been easier to throw my arms round him and kiss him close on the lips, but the aloofness in his pale, strained face demanded different treatment.

"What they want here are either *specialists*, or men who'll go away in the backblocks and live a dog's life, or men with a little capital. I don't mind the dog's life myself. But what does it lead to? It doesn't lead to you."

I wanted to tell him that if he would only let Arnold Holt use his influence, something could easily be found for him. But the words stuck in my throat. I wanted to beg him to let me put the matter to the dear, kind American, who, I knew, was quietly watching all this from the background, expecting, I felt sure, to be called in as adviser ere very long. It was not like asking for money. Any man, without losing self-respect, might ask another man to use his influence to get him work. I looked at Patrick then. He was looking away from me, and I saw the strengthening of the set of his mouth.

"Oh, my Sweetheart! My dearest one in all the world!" I said to myself, but I choked down the words and stifled an almost overwhelming desire to



crumple down on the arm of his chair and cradle his fair head against me with my two arms, by way of shutting out the world from that depressed yet defiant heart.

“They know a lot, these Australians”—he was frowning as he spoke—“they take a lot of beating. Most of the Englishmen who come out here seem a singularly, soppy lot compared to these fine Colonial fellows, who can put their hand to anything. I like them. I could get on with them. They’ve no hides to be rubbed off before you get to the real man.”

I listened eagerly.

I had heard much the same kind of thing from Arnold Holt, which thought confirmed me in my new uncle’s wisdom and in the satisfactory similarity between him and Patrick.

“An Australian knows something about everything. He has looked into pretty well everything that a man ought to look into—shooting, riding, sailing, physics, mechanics, natural science, electricity, engineering, literature, music, poetry. He looks upon the world as a place to live in and on himself as a rightful inhabitant, and so he’s not contented with taking things for granted as we are in England. Without making a fuss, out of his sheer manliness and common sense he finds out all he can about everything that a man ought to know. He can tell you anything you ask of him, from street-flagging to telegraph posts, from the trees to the stars, from the inside of a horse to the outside of a comet, and all sorts of little intimate, curious facts about things that never get into books, but are only found out by people who keep their brains and their eyes and their hearts wide open! His interest in things is *enormous*. And with it all he hasn’t the slightest idea how clever he is. The only thing he

isn't clever about is human nature. But, hallo ! P'r'aps I'm wrong about that. P'r'aps he's cleverest of all at that. For he knows when to keep his eyes shut. And when he has to open them he practises a decent brotherly attitude which, even if it doesn't run to 'Judge not,' never fails to arrive at not letting the thing—whatever it is—make any difference. There you have the real Australian man. The only thing that worries me is, am I clever enough for him ? As far as shipping goes, I've made up my mind that I'll have to drop that for the present. I don't know their methods well enough yet. I'll have to wait."

Here I had a brilliant stroke of inspiration.

Only I didn't know it was that. I thought it was just sheer idiocy, and felt ashamed of myself as I uttered it.

"What is it that you know best of all ?" I asked nervously. "What would you be best at ? What have you done the longest ?"

"Farming and breeding horses. I know a few up-to-date things that everybody out here hasn't got hold of yet. I know a secret about the grub of a racer that I don't believe any one out here knows, if only I could get a chance of putting it into practice !"

Then he got up and began to walk about the room.

"That's what I shall try for," he said. "Strange, I never thought of it before ! I'll try for horses. Ships can wait. But there won't be much money in it, Teresa. Not much to begin with, anyway."

"Patrick !"

"What ?"

"Will you let me say something to you ?"

"No !"

"Why not ?"

“ Because the fact that you’re afraid to say it shows there must be something wrong with it.”

“ Nonsense ! That’s sophistry, and sophistry is like Monkey Soap — it won’t *wash* everything ! Patrick, here goes. Don’t bite my head off, and don’t scowl. But Aunt Anna wants to make me a little allowance—say about a hundred a year, just to keep me going and help me out a bit in case—we—we get married ! It would be a help, you know. Will you let me take it ? ”

“ No ! ”

“ Surely you don’t mean that ? ”

But much I cared whether he did or didn’t. All I wanted was to know exactly what he thought.

“ Well, Teresa,” he said, at last, “ you’d better know the worst of it straight off. The fact is I couldn’t *stand* you taking that money from your Aunt. When you marry me, I’ve got to keep you. If I can’t keep you, then in my opinion I’ve no right to marry you. It’s all quite simple in my mind, though it may seem absurd to you. Perhaps it’s the way I’m made. But mind, Teresa, I don’t ask you to give it up on my account. You can do as you like about it.”

“ Which means that I must give *it* up, or give *you* up, I suppose ? ” I said.

But the prospect didn’t seem to frighten either of us very much.

A few days after that, when he came to see me, I saw the fierce sparkle of something wet in his eyes. Then he caught me to him.

“ You shall never, never leave me again ! Never, never ! For good or ill, you’ve got to share my fortunes now for evermore ! ”

“ That’s what I wanted ! ” I told him, when he let me speak.

I was in his arms, stifled almost, before the ecstasy of his clasp.

“We must be married at once ! My luck’s begun. I’ve been offered a little shakedown of a cottage on the cliffs looking out across the Pacific, with a garden and fowls and a horse and cart, and a stable that I’m to have entire charge of.”

Then he laughed suddenly, putting his hand under my chin, and tilting up my face.

The gaiety of his eyes seemed to bring back a sudden childhood’s vision of the joy beyond the sunsets.

## CHAPTER LIX

“SOME PEOPLE CALLED HALL!”

IN the scullery Rose, our maid-of-all-work, who was ironing Patrick's shirts, was singing loudly :

“I want you, my honey—I want you every minute.  
I'm thinking of you daily, and no one else is in it. . . .”

I smiled, then I sighed, for my thoughts had suddenly taken swift flight, and I was back in the drawing-room of the dear old house in Kensington Square, on the never-to-be-forgotten night when Patrick and I first crossed each other's orbits.

But I was too happy to be really homesick, although dear Aunt Anna and Arnold Holt were now *en route* for America.

It was quince jelly I was making—something that Patrick liked immensely ; and the quinces I had picked with my own hands off the thick, leafy trees at the edge of our garden.

Open before me on the kitchen table lay an old number of an English magazine, and from its pages I was assiduously following a recipe.

Or, rather, I was following it as well as I could, for where the magazine told me to pour it through a jelly-bag, I had to resort to a compromise. Having no jelly-bag, I turned a kitchen chair upside-down, tied a clean table-napkin over its four legs, and then, putting a basin underneath to catch my jelly, I poured

in the hot crimson fluid and let it drip through at its own sweet will.

A smell of scorching suddenly made itself evident.

"Rose!" I cried, "what's burning?"

"Nothing!" Rose shouted back.

I had long since given up all hope of teaching Rose to say "Madam."

Fiercer grew the smell, and I rushed in to see. A shriek escaped me.

"Rose! Just look what you've done! You've scorched the front of the master's favourite shirt!"

"Have I? And I never noticed it?"

"Couldn't you smell it? Right under your nose too!"

"I did smell something," confessed Rose; "but I thought it was your jelly!"

I shrieked again.

Rose had put down the burning iron on one of Patrick's handkerchiefs.

"If you go on like this, Rose, I shall have to learn to iron shirts myself," I remonstrated.

"The master'd never let you do that, Mrs. Hall!" said Rose imperturbably. "He's terribly fond of you, isn't he? No one'd ever think you'd been married six whole months, you two. Oh, well, I wish it was me! I don't see no chance of me and my Harry getting married for ages!"

"I wish you'd think less about Harry and more about those shirts," I said, laughing, in spite of myself, and returning to the kitchen.

I had my sleeves tucked up above my elbows, and over my pink print-frock I wore a big white apron, and every now and then a little gold thing on my left hand gleamed brightly, giving me a feeling of intense satisfaction, for a wedding-ring is the most wonderful

thing in the world when one is married to a man like Patrick.

I wanted some water to stand in the enamelled jampan, so I picked up a dipper and went out to the pump, which stood under an enormous grape-vine trained over a trellis roof to keep off the sun.

Huge bunches of purple grapes hung heavily down among the bright green leaves, and I glanced at their beauty and luxuriance with eyes that had not yet got accustomed to the wonderful fruit in Australia. To have grapes like that growing in one's back yard, over one's pump, gave me quite a feeling of importance, and I pumped my dipperful blithely.

Suddenly a voice, speaking quite near me, startled me almost out of my senses.

“Excuse me, my girl! Can you tell me if some people called Hall live here?”

*Crash!*

The dipper fell from my hands, the water splashed to left and right, and I reeled back as though I had seen a ghost.

“Oscar! . . . Lord Belhampton! . . . Am I mad or dreaming!” I gasped out.

## CHAPTER LX

### OSCAR AGAIN

“YOU'RE neither mad nor dreaming. But how, in Heaven's name, do you come to recognise me, my good girl ? ”

A cruel scarlet burnt my cheeks.

“ You appear to have forgotten me,” I said. “ I am Teresa Hall ! ”

“ Teresa ! ”

He started, but the start was overdone.

“ By Jove ! Oh, do please forgive me ! Teresa, by all that's wonderful ! Well, what an ass I've made of myself. I really took you to be a servant. It's the apron and turned-up sleeves.”

So unveiled, so premeditated was his insolence, that I experienced the wildest desire to box his ears.

But a little secret voice whispered to me urgently to be careful—very, very careful.

For this man had it in his power to do my beloved irreparable harm.

If Lord Belhampton—for since I had left England he had come into the title unexpectedly—once began spreading his old cruel story about Patrick having been in gaol there would be mischief.

Here at the Antipodes nothing of that awful episode had ever transpired, and Patrick was gradually struggling into a respected position among the young men



of the day, chiefly through his having evinced such a wonderful capacity for handling colts.

“ It’s hot out here ! ” I observed. “ Let’s come into the house.”

I led the way.

“ Awfully rummy chance my running up against you out here, isn’t it ? ” observed Oscar conversationally, as we walked round the garden at the side towards the front door, I still in my apron, and my sleeves rolled up, too proud and disdainful to appear in a hurry to pull them down. “ Curtis and I are globe-trotting on our way now to China and Japan. We’re staying with Hazel at Government House while in Sydney.”

“ Won’t you sit down ? ” I said politely.

He cast a swift, furtive glance around him, making no attempt to conceal his sneer, as he took in the cheap white matting stretched over our drawing-room floor, the cool but inexpensive wicker chairs and lounges, the little Japanese tables, the utter absence of anything in the way of handsome, solid furniture in mahogany, rosewood, oak.

There were no rare pictures on the plain white walls—nothing but a few simply framed engravings and photographs ; everything was as cheap as possible. But through the two great windows at the end of the room could be seen the blue, laughing waters of the vast Pacific Ocean, and from every part of the room you could see great ships passing on their way to China or Japan, or the South Sea Islands.

The windows were always open. The sweet, sea-laden breeze that came in was perfumed with the breath of flowers. To me the room was the most beautiful place in the whole wide world, and I loved its pretty, cheap chintzes with a tenderness that no

Chippendale or Sheraton subtleties could ever have inspired.

But Oscar looked at me as if it were all unspeakable.

“Poor old Teresa ! It cuts me to the heart to see you living like this ! ”

He gazed at me pityingly.

“I’m happy. That’s all that matters ! ”

My voice was as chilly as I dared make it.

He raised his eyebrows. He looked incredulous.

“When I think of what you’ve been used to at home, I wonder you can endure it.”

“I manage to survive it,” I replied, sarcastically.

Oh, if I only dared to wither and crush him with the fiery, contemptuous words that were burning in my breast !

If only I could say to him, “You snob ! ” and show him to the door.

But, no. Instead, I smiled, and leisurely pulled down my sleeves, and took off my apron, folding it up as though it were the most natural thing in the world to take off one’s apron in the drawing-room, and plying my visitor with questions about relatives and friends in England.

Then the sound of some one whistling out in the garden broke on my ears, and I smiled to myself suddenly.

I knew who was coming !

Next moment Patrick, rather hot and very dirty, appeared at the open window, and putting his hands on the window-sill vaulted unceremoniously into the room, garbed roughly in a striped shirt and dark-blue trousers, with a belt round his waist, and wearing neither coat nor waistcoat.

“Girl, are you there ? ”

He called aloud, not seeing me for a moment after coming in out of the blinding light.

I laughed, and went to him.

"Such a surprise, Patrick!" I said. "Here's Lord Belhampton, who used to be Mr. Courtney. He's been good enough to come out and see us."

I noted with fierce disgust how sneeringly Oscar's glance ran over Patrick's attire. But his words and manner were civil, almost ingratiating, as he expressed his pleasure at meeting old friends from home in this out-of-the-way part of the world.

"Where's tea, Teresa?" asked Patrick.

His eyes rested on me with a look that meant "What a nuisance this man being here, and I can't kiss you!"

The moment Oscar had gone I slid over to Patrick's side.

"Well, I suppose you're comparing me with your smart lordling?" he said crossly.

He looked gloomy, ruffling my hair with his big hand.

"I suppose I look like a tramp out of work beside him," he added presently.

I drooped against his chest.

"You look like a *man*!" I told him earnestly.

He held me close.

Presently he carried me across the room in his arms, and made me sit on his knee, keeping his arm about me while he filled his beloved pipe.

"Teresa, honest injun, don't you regret it a bit?"

"I refuse to answer."

"You might have been Lady Belhampton now!"

"And who'd have made your quince jellies, sir, I'd like to know, if I had been?"

"But he's such a swell, Teresa."

"I loathe swells."

“And he’s so rich.”

“If you thought very hard, you might find a reason for thinking *you* were richer still.”

But all the while, deep down in the bottom of my heart, there was a little gnawing, restless feeling of fear, which meant that I would have given anything if Oscar Courtney had not crossed our path just then.

## CHAPTER LXI

### WHY ?

“TERESA, such a rum thing has happened.”

It was a fortnight after Oscar's arrival, and Patrick had come home with the longest face I had seen him wearing since our marriage.

“You know Addison Holm ? You know he's promised to put his horses in my hands for training ? Well, when I went to him to-day to have the contract fixed up, he coolly informed me it was off. I pressed for an explanation, feeling that there was something hidden beneath his manner. He refused to explain. He was very nice, but I'm perfectly certain that he had got something against me up his sleeve.”

My heart turned to lead, but suddenly recovered itself and I smiled.

“Never mind,” I said carelessly ; “we'll do without Addison Holm's horses. It won't ruin us, will it, darling ? ”

“Not so bad as that. But, of course, it's a big throw-back.”

“Disgusting ! ” I said, more carelessly still.

“I wonder why he backed out ? ” said Patrick musingly.

“Men are always funny,” was my elaborate reply.

Secretly in my heart I was convinced that Oscar Courtney had already begun his malignant mischief-making.

And I was right.

That very night at Government House, looking down the table at Lord Belhampton's farewell dinner-party, I saw Patrick almost ignored by the two ladies on either side of him.

Afterwards, in the drawing-room, he was even more completely ostracised.

My cheeks were blanched with anger.

Oscar came over to me, begging me to look at the sea from the moonlit gardens.

"You're looking lovely to-night!" he added, in a low, familiar voice.

"What have you been saying about Patrick?" I asked him point-blank.

He started violently.

His whole manner underwent an instant change.

"What do you mean?" he asked, under his breath, his face pale, his eyes gleaming evilly.

"You know best," I answered meaningly.

He laughed, a mocking, sinister, revengeful laugh, that turned the blood cold in my veins and made me start to my feet.

Through the open French windows I saw Patrick wandering disconsolately up and down the verandah, looking across the moonlit magnolia-scented gardens to the sea.

"We shall go home," I said to myself furiously, "and never again as long as I live shall I have anything to do with these horrible, horrible people who believe things against my husband!"

But underneath my anger I was sad and dispirited. How cruel Fate was to dog and baulk us like this!

Captain Curtis, a bosom friend of Oscar's, who was travelling round the world with him, hurried up to me.

“Mrs. Hall, I’m going to take a moonlight photograph,” he said. “Do come out on the verandah and lend me your inspiration.”

“I’m afraid I’m in no mood for photographs,” I replied.

“Oh, but just a minute !” he pleaded. “Your black scarf and white frock are just what I want for my picture. I won’t keep you a second.”

“Well, be quick,” I said ungraciously. “I want to go home.”

The Captain opened a box, and began to look for some films.

Instead of films, however, he suddenly brought out a small white packet which appeared to cause him a good deal of surprise.

“By Jove !” I heard him muttering, “whatever’s this ? It feels like a book in an envelope. How did it get there ? I haven’t opened this box since I left Paris.”

He tore open the envelope.

“A pocket-book !” he exclaimed.

I, watching him with total lack of interest, suddenly felt as if an electric shock had been applied to my brain.

“A pocket-book ! By Jove, now I remember ! Oscar dashed into my rooms one day in Paris and asked me to mind a packet for him, and I put it in this case and forgot all about it. Why, what’s the matter, Mrs. Hall ?”

I snatched the book from his fingers.

I rushed to the nearest light, opened it, and read the inscription, “Oscar, from Teresa.”

It was the pocket-book Oscar had sworn had been stolen by Patrick from the Hôtel Blanc.

## CHAPTER LXII

### TIGRESS !

WITHOUT a word I turned and flew into the house, hiding the book under my black ninon scarf.

“Do you know where Lord Belhampton is ?” I asked of those I met.

“In the smoking-room,” said some one.

A group of men were talking together in the smoking-room as I made my appearance, and pausing on the threshold, I heard the following words, Lord Belhampton being the speaker.

“I wouldn’t say anything against Hall, only that I have been the means of introducing him and his wife into society in Sydney, so I think I must warn you all, gentlemen, that the fellow is an old gaol-bird.”

A white-gowned woman, with her fair head thrown back, here flashed into the centre of the group.

“Lord Belhampton,” I said, in the loudest voice I could manage, “you’re speaking of my husband and what you’re saying is a *lie* !”

I turned round and swept a fiery glance at all those listening men, whose shocked expressions told how startled they were at my extraordinary outburst. Old men and young in evening dress, with white flowers in their buttonholes, and smoking cigars, they all immediately assumed a deferential attitude, and I felt myself uplifted suddenly on the wave of their



chivalrousness, and perhaps if ever in my life I knew I was a pretty woman it was at that moment.

“It’s a lie !” I repeated, a little louder still. “My husband is one of the most injured men in the world ! It’s true that he once was charged with theft, but there was not a word of truth in the accusation. The directors apologised to him. He left the court without a stain on his character. And you, you coward, you mean, contemptible liar, you know what I say is true ! I dare you to deny it !”

White as death was Belhampton’s handsome face, and even in my rage I noticed that he had to moisten his lips with his tongue before he could articulate.

“I know that your husband was arrested for theft in England !” he said snarlingly. “Whether he was guilty or not I don’t know ; but there’s something that I do know, and it’s my duty to tell my friends and warn them against the man who has pushed himself into our midst, simply because we have been trying to be kind to you. I know that he’s an outsider and an upstart,” he went on. “In Paris he was a sort of waiter in a cheap hotel, and I know for myself that he’s a thief. Look here, everybody, I hate to have to say such a thing, but the truth is that this man stole my pocket-book in Paris. Miss Martindale, as she was then, tried to shield him by pretending that she had burnt it ; but nobody was deceived. Nobody believed her. Every one knew that she was simply attempting to shield the man she intended to marry.”

I laughed scornfully.

“Lord Belhampton never lost his pocket-book !” I said.

Every bit of contempt I could devise I threw into my voice as I spoke.

“Lord Belhampton *hid* it ! He went straight from

the hotel, seizing an envelope from the hall of the Hôtel Blanc as he passed out ; and going to his friend, Captain Curtis, who was staying at the hotel opposite, he asked him to take care of this sealed packet. And to-night Captain Curtis discovered the packet. It has been lying all the time in one of his photographic boxes. And here it is. I recognise it because I gave it him myself—Oscar, from Teresa ! ”

I held up the book.

Oscar, livid and trembling, stepped close to me, and bending his head hissed into my ear :

“ You shall both suffer for this ! ”

One withering, paralysing look I gave him, then I slipped from the room, my heart on fire to get to Patrick.

## CHAPTER LXIII

### ANY WIFE AND ANY HUSBAND

I MET him coming towards me, through the wide palm-lined corridor—a tall, manly figure in evening dress, walking with that splendid swing from the hips.

“I was looking for you,” he said.

His tone made me start, and glancing swiftly into his face I saw an expression that filled me with dismay. His lips were set, his face as white as death, his eyes gleamed with a strange fire. Drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

“Where have you been?” he said hoarsely. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere. Where have you been?”

“I—I was in the smoking-room.”

“*In the smoking-room!* Was Bellhampton there?”

“Yes. But, Patrick! What’s the matter? Why do you look like that? You frighten me!”

“Come home!” he said hoarsely.

I kept silent till we had left the fairy-like, white city of Sydney behind us, and were driving seawards through the green places of Centennial Park.

“Now, Patrick, tell me what has happened. I know by your face that it’s something dreadful.”

He told me.

“I was having a smoke in the garden, waiting for you, and doing my best to be patient till you wanted to go home, when suddenly, quite close to me, I heard

your name. A man and a woman were talking hidden from me by a magnolia-tree. Before I could move he said to her: 'Belhampton's fairly lost his head over that pretty little Mrs. Hall, and they're going to make a bolt for it. She's an old love of Belhampton's. In fact, they were engaged once, in England. Belhampton told me this himself—in strictest confidence—of course—but I know you won't breathe a word. To-morrow morning at dawn he sails for China and Japan, and she's going with him.'

"Then the woman said: 'I'm not surprised. Every one says that Mrs. Hall is desperately unhappy with that awful husband of hers, living in a little ramshackle horse-breeder's cottage after a life of luxury in England.'"

"Oh, Heaven!" I broke in passionately. "Never was there a more shameless, unfounded lie!"

He turned sideways and looked at me, and as our eyes met I saw dumb agony in the depths of his.

"You couldn't believe such things, surely?" I cried scornfully. "Why do you let them worry you? What does it matter what people say?"

"It would be quite natural if you did regret having left everything for me," he answered dully. "It would be quite natural if you missed all the luxuries and comforts you have been used to in your old home in Kensington Square; and perhaps it would be natural, too, if the sight of Belhampton recalled afresh what you have lost—thrown away for my sake."

"If ever you say such a thing as that to me again, I shall go away and leave you. Oscar is nothing to me—nothing at all!" I cried hotly. "Nothing, nothing, nothing! I shan't even take the trouble to despise him any more. I think he's beneath it. If

there wasn't another man in the world but Lord Belhampton, I assure you I wouldn't marry him ! ”

“ But you liked him once ? ”

“ Not really.”

“ Enough to get engaged to him ! ”

“ I'd have become engaged to a sweep just then if he'd asked me ! ”

“ Weren't you attracted to him at all ? ”

“ I wouldn't even let him kiss me.”

“ When you were engaged, do you mean ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ But, why ? ”

“ Patrick ! You know quite well why ! Because I was yours, body and soul I was yours, and I couldn't bear another man to kiss my lips.”

Then our slow, old economical conveyance stopped at the little white gates of our cottage, and we made our way through the peaceful flower-haunted garden towards the house.

Lights were blazing, and the front door was suddenly flung open, revealing the figure of Rose.

“ Oh, here you are at last ! ” Rose cried excitedly. “ You must have passed Lord Belhampton on the way.”

“ What do you mean ? ” asked Patrick strangely.

“ Lord Belhampton's just motored down and left this 'ere letter for Mrs. 'All. His lordship said I was to be careful, and see that she got it the minute she got in. And look what he give me—a sovereign ! 'E just put it in my 'and, and said, ‘ There you are,’ and jumped back into his car and was off like winky ! ”

I took the letter, and followed Patrick into the dining-room.

“ You can go to bed, Rose,” I said hurriedly. “ Don't wait any longer.”

Then I shut the dining-room door behind me and turned to Patrick.

He had flung off his overcoat, and was standing by the table, on which Rose had arranged the little supper of claret and sandwiches. The light shone on his fair hair, evoking little sunny gleams of gold. It showed the pallor of his face, the set lines of his lips, and the drawn, haggard, yet wild expression of his eyes.

“What’s the meaning of that letter?” he said. “What is Belhampton writing to you that needs such urgent delivery?”

His tone was alive with fresh and bitter suspicion.

“I don’t know,” I answered simply.

Going over to him, I put the letter down in front of him, and seated myself on the sofa.

“*You* open it,” I said.

“Not I!” he said.

With a gesture of loathing he pushed it towards me.

“Please read it!” I pleaded.

I had a strange, indescribable feeling about it, and it seemed to me that I could not, absolutely could not, summon up courage to break open the envelope.

Then a sudden inspiration came to me.

“I’ll tell you what it is, Patrick! It’s an apology!” I cried excitedly.

And jumping up I tore the envelope open.

Some instinct, I suppose it was, made me turn away from my husband as the first words reached me, and I felt that the cruel tide of scarlet dyeing my face as I tried to hide it from Patrick was revealed even at the back of my neck, for never in my life had I had anything like this to blush over.

Crumpling the letter in my hand, I made a sudden blind step towards the fireplace as if in search of a

fire ; but the grate was full of peach blossoms, standing in a big cheap blue vase of Japanese china, and there was no friendly flame to consume Lord Belhampton's revengeful words.

"Teresa, show me that letter !" said a voice behind me.

"No, no ; I can't ! You mustn't !"

"Show it to me !"

"I won't !"

"I insist !"

"I refuse !"

"You must ! I'm your husband. I've the right to. I tell you I will and must see it."

"Oh, don't, don't, don't ! It's awful ! It's a plot——"

My five little fingers, that were fighting so wildly to keep the letter in their grasp, were suddenly unfolded as though they were paper by Patrick's iron hand, and next moment, turning away a little, he read Oscar's epistle through slowly from beginning to end.

"DEAR LITTLE TERESA,

"What will you think of me, I wonder, when I tell you that, after all, I'm going to refrain from keeping you to your promise to throw up everything and come with me to China. You've told me of your terrible unhappiness. I hate to think you should suffer so, but I've come to the conclusion that it would be fatal for me to interfere.

"I am very, very fond of you. If you had married me, it would have been my delight to crown you with every luxury and devote my whole life to your happiness. But somehow I doubt now if we would make each other happy. As I say, I'm very, very

fond of you, but you know yourself you have dropped from our class, and I don't believe that you would ever feel comfortable again in my set.

"I'm afraid that some day you'll find yourself very short of money, and if so I feel sure you will not resent my asking you to turn to me for assistance. And now good-bye, Teresa. I'm going out of your life, but I know you will ever keep a little corner in your heart for

"Your devoted

"OSCAR."

I got up and made a few blind, stumbling steps across the room, but before I could reach the door Patrick was after me.

His hands seized me, and his arms turned me round from the door as though I were a feather, seized me and clasped me.

"Teresa, Teresa! You poor little love! Oh, what a brute I've been! And how I have been making you suffer, my little one, my dear!"

I burst into tears.

"Why d-d-do you s-speak like that?" I mumbled, my voice muffled with gulps and sobs. "Do you mean you don't believe what the letter says?"

"*Believe it!*"

He let me go, and went over to the fireplace for the tongs.

He picked up the letter—but with the tongs—and applying a match to it watched it burn away to black nothingness; then he threw the ashes into the fire-place, and came back to me.

Cradling me in his arms, he whispered:

"Teresa, you believed in me once when things looked very rotten against me, and as I read that



letter just now the day when you came to the lawyer's office and bravely fought for me, though I was a suspected felon, flashed over my memory. I said to myself: 'Since little Teresa's love and faith were great enough to survive that test, am I going to be behind her in trust and belief?' Ah, my Sweet! I'm a jealous dog where you're concerned. Perhaps it's because I have blinding moments of realisation, when I seem to get in touch with the wonder of you, and compare you with my very ordinary self. But as to doubting you—no! Lord Belhampton overshot the mark when he wrote that letter, for at last I see quite plainly that he's a worm and a coward; and never again, as long as I live, shall I be able to reproach myself for having taken you from him."

"I should think not!" I muttered, my face against his breast.

"But, oh, if only I wasn't so poor! For your sake, my darling, because I ache so to give you the things you ought to have. And there's no doubt Belhampton has done me a lot of harm. I only hope," he added, with an anxious little laugh, "that everybody is not going to turn against me. But, after all"—quickly striking a lighter note—"even if I were the thief and liar Belhampton tried to make me out, that wouldn't affect their *horses*."

"Our luck will turn," I whispered passionately; "I know it will! It's a only question of *believing*!"

"And trying!" He placed the word on my forehead with a kiss.

"And loving!"—from the Everlasting Woman.

## CHAPTER LXIV

### THE CHANCE

It was next morning.

I was groping about the garden, looking for eggs in all the strange, mysterious places our fowls choose for depositing them, when I was startled by the sound of a motor stopping at our front gate.

"Patrick—a visitor!" I called.

With his axe in his hand Patrick went down the garden to meet the tall, spruce-looking gentleman in immaculate white clothes and white Panama who was advancing towards him.

I, crouching behind a banana bush, watched spell-bound, seeing that our visitor was the Governor of New South Wales himself!

"Mr. Hall," I heard him say, "I've come to ask if you will do me a great favour. I hear you're so wonderful with horses, and have the most up-to-date ideas, having come from England later than any of us. Now I've a filly that's disappointed all expectations so far, and I'm frightfully keen on her winning the Geebar Cup. Will you undertake her training? If we pull off the race, I intend to retire her to stud afterwards, and I promise you to make you a present of her first foaling."

"You're very kind," said Patrick.

"May I be frank with you?" Lord Hazel went

on. "I've heard things—deuced unpleasant things—as to the way in which you've been treated. Lord Belhampton has gone for ever, and I'm sincerely glad of it. But Mrs. Hall last night completely routed him. There's not a man in Sydney to-day but isn't longing to show you his contempt for the cruel things that have been in circulation against your character. But, after all, when a young man has a wife like yours he need never be afraid. 'Pon my word, she was splendid! The poor dear child! I felt exactly as though she were my own daughter. Her father and I were at Eton together, so small and strange a little world is it! Really, she was splendid! By Jove, she was! I shall never forget it as long as I live!"

They both started and looked round, thinking perhaps that a dingo was running through the garden; but, as a matter of fact, it was I, Teresa, escaping with scarlet cheeks through the loudly cracking meshes of the banana-trees, and making a bee-line for the house.

When I got safely inside, I bolted myself into the pantry, and sitting down on a bag of sugar I cried as if my heart would break; only they were tears of sheerest, purest joy.

For my beloved was going to have a chance at last.

## CHAPTER LXV

### THE TURN OF THE TIDE

“TERESA, Teresa ! Are you ready ? ”

“Coming ! ” I called back gaily.

“What are you doing ? ”

“Just putting my hat on ! ”

“Well—hurry, hurry. It’s getting late ! ”

I ran on to the verandah, looking very cool and summery in a white muslin frock that I had starched and ironed myself, and a large white, shady hat with a floating white gossamer veil, white shoes, white gloves, and white parasol. The heat was so tremendous that one seemed unable to endure even the slightest touch of colour in one’s raiment.

“Do I look nice ? ” I queried to my lord and master, who, while he waited impatiently for me, had been giving baby Anna a toss or two into the air.

“Nicer than any other woman on the racecourse. That’s a foregone conclusion.”

Bidding good-bye with hasty kisses to the little sweet-tempered, chattering girl whom we had named after my beloved Aunt, we climbed into the cart, and soon were driving away through the brilliant, blinding sunlight towards the Randwick Racecourse.

To-day was a great day for Patrick and me, for Patrick’s horse, The Dime, was running in the Cup.

Now, so far The Dime had done nothing whatever to justify Patrick’s absolute belief in his powers.

A good many men had shaken their heads over him and opined gloomily that the horse hadn't sufficient stamina, and that Hall overrated him absurdly.

But Patrick only smiled, and went on sturdily devoting himself to The Dime. His care was incredible. I used to say to him laughingly, sometimes, that he took far more interest in that horse than he did in his own child; and really I don't believe the animal was ever out of his thoughts from the moment she came into his possession day and night, night and day.

"You wait and see," was all he said.

So I waited.

We were poor still, very poor, but I had long ago learned to place an absolute reliance on Patrick's judgment, and I never doubted for one instant that we should some day emerge from our condition of constant anxiety as to making ends meet—pay our rent, pay Rose's wages, pay our butcher and baker and candlestick-maker, and our doctor's bills (which, unfortunately, had proved rather serious items in our expenditure, Patrick having been laid up for nearly three months with a nasty fever, and baby Anna having systematically caught everything possible to babydom—croup, whooping-cough, measles—only to blossom out fresher and healthier than ever afterwards).

"Do you really think The Dime may have a look in?" I asked

"I really do."

"But Sorcerer's in it," I said.

For that was what everybody said, in fact.

"Yes, Sorcerer's in it," agreed Patrick affably.

He looked at me sideways, his quizzical, searching, scrutinising look, half teasing, half serious.

"Can you stand a shock?" he said.

“ Try me.”

“ Well, then, I have put every penny we have in the world on The Dime. The odds are fifty to one—an outsider if you like, eh ? ”

“ Really ! ”

I laughed up at him.

If he chose to do so, it was all right, and I utterly refused to be either shocked or shaken.

But I had my reward.

That was the best of Patrick—one always got one’s reward and quickly.

Lifting me down from the cart—white muslin frills, parasol, veils, and all—he kept me just a second in those strong arms of his.

“ Adorable thing ! ” he whispered.

I was content, and when an hour later we stood side by side watching the start of the great race of the season I’m afraid I heard above all the shouts and clamour of the crowds those two swift-spoken words :

“ Adorable thing ! ”

“ They’re off ! ” cried a hundred voices.

“ The Grafter’s leading ! ”

“ There goes Anisette ! ”

“ Here comes Sorcerer ! ”

“ Sorcerer’s leading ! ”

“ The Grafter’s fallen back ! ”

“ Look at Sorcerer ! ”

“ Sorcerer wins ! ”

“ Hallo, what’s that coming up ? It’s some rotten outsider ! ”

“ Pink, blue, and white ! What’s pink, blue, and white ? ”

“ Pink, blue, and white. It’s The Dime ! ”

“ Pink, blue, and white is coming up ! ”

I felt dreamy, and in a vague, dim way I told myself

in a whisper, "Pink from Anna's cheeks, white from Anna's tooth, blue from Anna's eyes."

For that was how that husband of mine had chosen his race-horse's colours.

The thunder of voices sounded in my ears like the waves of the sea as I stood there at Patrick's side, leaning over the railings, and watching pink, blue, and white flash past, and past again, on and on, lengths ahead now of everything but Sorcerer.

I heard cries and shouts and exclamations.

I felt Patrick's hand give a sudden clutch on my arm.

Then his voice whispered calmly, "The Dime's done it."

Alone we stood there—dazed, stunned—just we two together, the woman in her white dress a little frightened, a little uncomprehending, the big man by her side scarcely realising yet that one of the most wonderful race-horses in the world had come into his indisputable possession as a gift. Then our hands found each other's and clasped, and suddenly, for no reason whatever that any one could imagine, there burst from my lips an exclamation so strange that I started back from it in wonder as I heard it float into the golden air around me :

"*Papa !*"

Ah, that moment, that wonderful, unreal moment. Could life ever again offer us anything like that ! The thousands of people around us seemed like so many trumpet-bearers to our glory. The fierce blue sky above waved like a brilliant banner in response to this surge of new and almost catastrophic emotions in our two poor naïve, unworldly breasts. The heat, the glittering yellow light and black shadows, the burnt grass, the dust, the scent of gum-trees, the odours of

earth and horses and the crowd, the meteoric wave of excitement that was still flashing and crashing above that vast assemblage, our hands clasping and clinging, and the winning number shouting down at us from the pole, and at home on the vine-wreathed verandah little Anna with her doll. . . . No, in the years to come we might have riches, we might pass on from our shabby little cottage on the Pacific slope and do different things, and take a different place in the world, but nothing could ever equal the wild ecstasy of that moment when Patrick said to me with trembling lips :  
“ I’ve made a Thousand Pounds ! ”



## CHAPTER LXVI

### FIVE YEARS AFTER

I PUT my head out of the taxi as we left Charing Cross behind us, and looked about me incredulously.

“Isn’t it marvellous !” I cried.

Grey skies, an ice-bound wind sweeping bitterly through the sombre, leaden air, rich people shivering inside their wraps, and the poor blowing on their cold fingers to warm them.

But Patrick and I had had enough of heat, and these grey skies and icy winds of old England were filling us with rapture, for those long years of scorching summers, with never a cloud on the sky from end to end and a parched world ever calling out appealingly for water, had given us a positive hunger for our poor dear climate where there is so often no sunshine at all.

Baby Anna and I were wrapped in furs, Patrick having bought me some magnificent sables in Russia as we made the trip across the Trans-Siberian route, while for little Anna he had indulged in the sweetest coat of white ermine, out of which our baby’s blue eyes sparkled like stars in a frosty sky, and her gold curls danced merrily under the little white fur bonnet.

“Whatever will Papa say when he sees her ?” My voice cracked. “Fancy, she’s the only little granddaughter. Both Peggy’s children are boys, and Hilary’s also.”

Our taxi whizzed along Kensington High Street, and a series of staccato little exclamations kept bursting from my lips.

“There’s Barker’s! Fancy Barker’s still being there! And there’s Derry & Toms’! How extraordinary! I had a sort of idea somehow that all the shops and houses that used to be here would have disappeared. Doesn’t it seem incredible, Patrick, to come back to England after five whole years and find Barker’s still there?”

“You child!” murmured the tall, smiling man at my side.

Then old Kensington Square appeared, and at the sight of the dear, familiar trees my heart gave a great throb. It was all I could do to keep from bursting into tears. I think Patrick understood, for I felt him suddenly take hold of my hand, and keep it close and warm in his until our taxi stopped before the grey house facing the Square.

Then up the steps and into the house.

Five years is a long time, and everything had long since been forgiven or forgotten, and as I fell into Papa’s arms and noted with a curious pang that his hair and moustache were now as white as snow, I had never a thought of anything but that he was my father and I loved him, just as tiny Anna loved Patrick.

Everybody was kissing everybody, and the old, dear drawing-room, looking considerably shabbier for the onslaughts of various little pickles of boys that raided the house when Peggy and Hilary came over, was turned into a scene of indescribable excitement.

“Teresa, darling,” whispered Mama, sweet and gentle as ever when we had a few minutes to our-

selves on the sofa, "what a dear, good man you've married!"

"Yes, he *is* a darling."

"Oh, my dear, to see you looking like this, the happiest woman in the world, and to think that wonderful little girl is yours, seems like a fairy-tale after what we suffered on your account, my poor darling!"

"I'm sorry you suffered, Mama. But that's all over now. And Patrick was worth everything. Never for one moment do I regret it—what we two went through together."

"And is it true that he has come home to buy up Tindalls'?"

"Quite true," I nodded, stroking her grey-satin knee as we sat there side by side. "Patrick had no real love for racing. That was only a means to an end. A grateful client of his once made him a promise that if his horse won a certain race he would retire it to stud and make Patrick a present of its first foaling, and that's how we got The Dime. She was a wonderful mare—she's quite made our fortunes. But now Patrick intends to return to his old love—shipping—and when he heard that Tindalls' was on the market he made up his mind to come back to England, buy up the whole concern, and devote his faculties to the work he cares about most. Ah, he has wonderful ideas, Mama—wonderful! Wait and see!"

"I always liked him." Mama's eyes caressed him. "I always knew he was different from every one else."

She paused, and looked at me a little timidly.

"Teresa, dear," she said, "there's one thing that has always puzzled and troubled us. But now that Patrick has come back, perhaps it will be put right."

I dare say just a word from him will be sufficient. But the truth is there was such a mystery about the way that—that painful, *painful* affair at 'Tindalls' ended, that many people, unable to understand what really happened, believed, and still believe, that Patrick perhaps was guilty. You see, that money seemed to be put back in some mysterious way, and the general opinion was that—well, that—perhaps 'Tindalls' themselves were responsible for the feeling!—that the directors had simply withdrawn the charge out of *pity*!”

But we were interrupted by Patrick coming close to us, and I had no chance to answer.

As I was dressing that night for dinner at Peggy's, Patrick came and knocked at my door.

“Teresa, put on all your diamonds!” he said, with his brows contracted in a way that meant he had been thinking hard.

“Really? Would you like me to? Won't it be rather showy?”

“To please me——!” he said decisively. “And wear that silver gown you bought in Vienna.”

I looked at him in surprise.

“I really believe you want to ‘show off,’ you naughty boy!” I said laughingly. “That gown is *terribly* smart!”

“I want to show *you* off!” he answered soberly.

“But won't it be absurd to be decked out so at a quiet family dinner?”

He came over to me, and taking my face between his hands looked down into my eyes, and I felt there was something passing in his brain that I could not quite understand. Then he kissed me and went off to dress.

When we arrived at the Creays' house, I found Jean

waiting in the hall—Jean in a pale pink frock with coral and diamond earrings, and uttering a little cry she ran to me, and we fell into each other's arms.

“So you got him, after all!” she whispered, as we two, with flagrant unceremoniousness, stole into the library and shut the door behind us. “You got him, and you deserved him. Oh, I don't mind telling you now, Teresa, that I was madly in love with him once. And you who have married him will understand the reason. He was the only man I'd ever met who made me feel absolutely certain that he had it in himself to fight the battle of life through *on his own*, unaided, unpatronised, doing everything off his own bat, and carving his way up the ladder to the very, very top.”

I kissed her warmly, all my old love for her reviving like a dying fire that had been blown back to flame.

“Yes, Patrick is like that,” I said. “And I suppose it was that quality in him that attracted me too.”

“Well, he was worth while being attracted to,” said Jean, “and for my part I'm jolly glad I made such a little fool of myself. I'm proud of it, in fact, for he's a darling—he's a white man! But, of course,” she added slyly, “I've got a white man of my own now, so you needn't be afraid! I've promised to marry Peter Mayford before long, the youngest and quite the most wonderful Admiral in the British Navy!”

Then the others burst in and fell upon us and tore us apart, and bore us sternly away to the drawing-room.

Peggy's great, glittering, magnificent room was turned to-night into a perfect bower of priceless hot-house flowers—roses, lilac, lilies, carnations, hyacinths, orchids, violets, and white heather for luck—and the electric lights were all softly shaded with real pink roses, casting an ineffably tender glow over everything.

And how grand was our Peggy ! In a violet brocade emblazoned with golden and purple lilies, a wealth of amethysts and diamonds about her white, shapely throat and bosom, and her beautiful, ruddy hair looking like burnished gold, she flashed about among her guests, which included dear Aunt Anna and Mr. Holt and the Admiral and Mrs. Binning, while Bobby, who appeared to me smaller and more insignificant-looking than ever, beamed blissfully on us all, and especially on me and Patrick.

“ So ripping your being here,” Bobby said, as he led me down the great white marble staircase, garlanded with roses, towards the Louis Treize dining-room with its fleur-de-lys tapestries.

“ Bobby, quickly, tell me, what’s happened to Oscar ? ”

“ Married the prettiest and most rapid chorus-girl in London. And she’s making ducks of the money he hasn’t made drakes of ! Poor Oscar ! ”

“ Poor chorus-girl ! ” said I.

It was towards the end of dinner when I saw Patrick suddenly rise in his seat.

“ We’re all friends and relations here to-night,” he said, “ so I hope I’ll be forgiven for making a speech. But I’ve something to say. And I fancy that you’ll all of you be glad to hear it for my wife’s sake, if not for my own. Well, it’s about Tindalls’. You may perhaps have seen in the papers lately that Mr. Walter Tindall is dead. His death sets me at liberty, I think, to speak of a matter that concerns my reputation. It was while I was awaiting my trial that the following happened :

“ One day an inspiration seized me, and I went out to the private house of the head of the firm.

“ I might have been refused admittance, but I

met Mr. Tindall in the hall, and begged him to see me alone for a moment.

"Then I told him straight out that I believed his brother Ernest was the thief, because he deliberately lied when he said that he had passed me coming into the office at nine o'clock as he was going away.

"No such meeting had ever happened, and the very fact of Ernest Tindall going out of his way to make such a statement had roused my suspicions, and several things had deepened them since.

"At first Walter Tindall was furious, but at the same time I noticed there was a distinct look of consternation in the back of his eyes, and watching him I began to be aware that he was uneasy.

"Then he said, 'It is absolutely untrue. My brother is the last person in the world to commit such a crime.'

"I said, 'Your brother is in difficulties. He has been in the hands of moneylenders. I've been finding out one or two things about him, and I've now discovered that a few days after the robbery he paid a big moneylender's bill for which he was being threatened, and he also deposited £200 in gold in the Post Office.'

"And just then the door opened, and Ernest Tindall came lurching in.

"He had been dining and wining with some friends, and hardly knew what he was doing.

"I went over to him, seized him by the arm, and looked into his face.

"'Your brother and I know the whole truth,' I said.

"He gave a cry and staggered back, looking the picture of abject terror.

"A few minutes later, without the slightest diffi-

culty, the truth was being wrung from him, and his broken-hearted brother promised me to withdraw the charge against myself immediately on condition that Ernest's name was kept entirely out of the matter.

"Because—and this was what influenced me most—their mother was a very frail invalid, whom the slightest shock might kill.

"We made up a story about finding the gold in a drawer of the Director's bureau, and I left the Court without a stain on my character technically, although the mysteriousness of the finale left many people in doubt as to what really happened. I realise now how my character was blackened. But Mrs. Tindall is long since dead, and Ernest has taken himself off no one knows where, and now that poor, clever, industrious Walter Tindall has suddenly passed away, I feel at liberty to vindicate my character, and let my dear wife and all the rest of you know what really happened."

Patrick's voice died away, and he sat down in silence.

For a moment no one spoke.

The fact was there was no one able to.

Then Papa got to his feet, and lifting his glass murmured two words in a rather trembling voice :

"To Patrick !"

But Patrick turned to me.

Leaning towards me, his blue eyes fixed on mine, he touched my glass with his.

"To Her whose belief in me made all things possible !" he said.

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THE END

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